Entertainment / A26

Rebecca Lustero: The actress who lives and sells seashells by the sea

Business / B1

Peso rallies to 5-month high of P55.91 to $1

Lifestyle / C4

All about Amparing Aspiras as mom on her 79th birthday

Sports / A20

Asi Taulava gets permanent injunction

Across / A15

Ex-Quezon police chief slain by Red rebels near home

Palace indulgent toward Erap's HK gallivanting

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

MALACAÑANG is taking an indulgent stance toward ousted President Joseph Estrada's behavior after his knee-replacement surgery.

"He just had a dinner [with his friends] and slept in the [Parkview] hotel. Things like that are not serious [infractions]. That's forgivable,

PALACE/ A9

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

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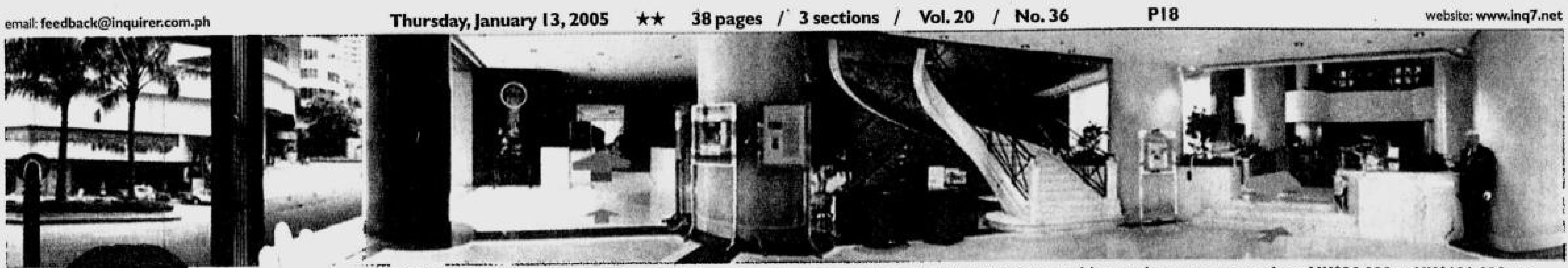
Luisita farmer accuses Noynoy's supporters

By Michael Lim Ubac

A SUGAR farmer yesterday blamed followers of Rep. Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III for the second bloody clash at the strike-bound Hacienda Luisita in Tarlac City on Jan. 5.

"*Opo, sir, mga bata po ni* Noynoy Aquino (Yes, sir, they are Noynoy Aquino's men),"

LUISITA/ A4



THE MAGNIFICENCE of the lobby of the Hong Kong Parkview evokes a luxurious European ambience where rent ranges from HK$30,000 to HK$101,000 per month for units ranging in size from 770 to 2,067 sq. ft. The address of prestige of the resort residential hotel is 88 Tai Tam Reservoir Road.

"GIVE Erap a hand and he'll ask for the whole arm," says PlunderWatch of Estrada's Hong Kong holiday.

Estrada coming home Saturday

Motion for 6-day extension in HK withdrawn

By Armand N. Nocum
and Michael Lim Ubac

WITH his living-it-up lifestyle, an alleged violation of the court resolution governing his trip to Hong Kong now public knowledge, Joseph Estrada has ordered his lawyers to withdraw his motion to extend his stay there until Jan. 21.

The deposed President, who is recovering from a knee-replacement operation at the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital, is to return on Philippine Airlines' PR 309 on Jan. 15 following a 20-day stay in the former Crown Colony. His flight arrives at 12:30 p.m., according to his media handlers.

Estrada, 67, phoned his lawyers to relay his decision amid a heated debate yesterday at the Sandiganbayan special division concerning his alleged violation of the court-imposed conditions on his medical trip. Prosecution lawyers brought to court copies of yesterday's INQUIRER, which had the report of his four police escorts as banner story.

"To cut short this controversy, he's coming home on Jan. 15. We hope and pray there will be no complication," Estrada's lead counsel Rene Saguisag announced at the hearing.

Sen. Jinggoy Estrada confirmed that his father's lawyers had withdrawn the request for an extended stay. He said he would fly to Hong Kong today to collect his father and the rest of the family,

"He will be back on Jan. 15, as ordered by the Sandiganbayan," the senator said.

Special Prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio said after the hearing that Estrada could have withdrawn the motion because "he realized that *bistado na siya* (he has been found out)."

He said the prosecution would also interview Estrada's police escorts regarding the latter's supposed trips outside the hospital.

The Jan. 12 issue of the INQUIRER reported that Estrada stayed

ESTRADA/ A9

Erap says burning of ABS-CBN OB van a warning to media

By Armand N. Nocum

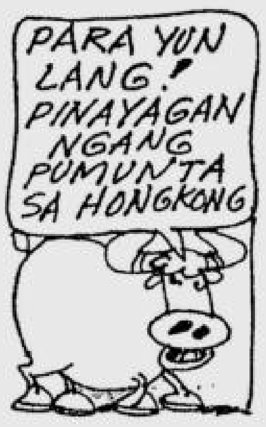
EVEN AS Malacañang condemned Tuesday's burning of an ABS-CBN van by a group claiming to be supporters of the late actor Fernando Poe Jr., deposed President Joseph Estrada yesterday said the attack should serve as a warning to media organizations allegedly engaged in biased reporting.

Estrada called up the INQUIRER from Hong Kong to also voice his displeasure over the news coverage of his medical trip to the former British colony, saying it was a clear indication that the media were abusing its powers and no longer contributing to the country's progress.

These were the same arguments that Estrada had raised when he instigated an advertisers' boycott of the INQUIRER during his three years in power. The INQUIRER survived the ad boycott, but Estrada was overthrown during the so-called "Edsa II" in 2001 and later thrown in jail on plunder charges.

Six masked gunmen stopped an ABS-CBN OB van at dawn Tuesday in Mandaluyong City, ordered the

ERAP/ A8



PARA YUN LANG! PINAYAGAN NGANG PUMUNTA SA HONGKONG

Cops reporting on HK whoopee to be probed

By Christian V. Esguerra

JOSEPH Estrada's police escorts are under fire for letting him make whoopee in Hong Kong.

Philippine National Police Director General Edgar Aglipay yesterday said he would ask the Sandiganbayan about the extent of the authority vested on Supt. Pedro Nicolas and the three other police officers making up Estrada's escort team.

"If they violated the authority given to them, then the necessary administrative charges will be filed against them," he told reporters in an ambush interview.

Aglipay said he would find out whether it was all

COPS/ A9

Erap barber flew business class to HK

IT APPEARS that Joseph Estrada's barber flew to Hong Kong on business class.

Annoyed at the controversy generated by the INQUIRER banner story on the Jan. 11 report of his four police escorts that, among other things, he had his barber flown in to see to his hair, Estrada yesterday phoned to say that a mountain was being made out of a molehill.

"They are blowing up a small issue," he said, adding that he had to get his barber to Hong Kong because its Adventist Hospital did not allow "hospital service."

"I can't go to a beauty parlor. My hair is now long and I can't face my guests with that look. What's wrong with that?" the ex-

ERAP/ A9

VAL HANDUMON

"I am going to last my whole term," President Arroyo confidently says at the 60th anniversary celebration of the Manila Overseas Press Club at the Palace on Wednesday night.

GMA: I've full trust in Noli not to jump ship

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.
and Juliet Labog-Javellana

AMID rumored plots to destabilize her shaky government, President Macapagal-Arroyo confidently declared last night that she would finish her entire six-year term.

Ms Arroyo also said she trusted her Vice President Noli de Castro would not jump ship.

"I am going to last my whole term and I will leave my 10-point program," Ms Arroyo replied during the 60th anniversary of the Manila Press Club held in Malacañang last night attended by journalists, Cabinet officials, military officers and diplomats.

The President was asked to react to rumors of another destabilization plot to unseat her following the death of her rival for the presidency, Fernando Poe Jr., who had accused her of cheating her way into Malacañang.

Poe's widow, Ms Susan Roces, has vowed to pursue the electoral protest filed by her husband against Ms Arroyo before the Supreme Court.

Asked how she felt about the opposition floating the idea about

GMA/ A8

Salonga: GMA is impeachable

By Fe Zamora

ANYTHING—and everything—for power.

President Macapagal-Arroyo will "do anything to stay in power," including allowing her nemesis Joseph Estrada to undergo surgical operations for his knees in Hong Kong even if it would mean violating the rule of law, former Senate President Jovito Salonga said.

"From the time she ascended to the presidency in January 2001, GMA (Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo) has no use for the rule of law. She had always wanted Estrada to go scot-free abroad," Salonga said in a scathing documented analysis of Estrada's trip to Hong Kong to be published this weekend in Kilos-

SALONGA/ A8

WHAT HARD TIMES?

Palace says Pinoys downed more beer last year

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.
and Luige A. del Puerto

FILIPINOS may not be reeling from hard times as they are gulping down more beer and splurging on pre-paid cellular phone cards, Malacañang said yesterday.

To counter the gloomy economic outlook painted by recent polls, Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye cited an AC Nielsen survey showing record sales for beer last year and the rise of pre-paid cellular phone cards as the country's best-selling consumer itemS next only to infant milk.

"If they can afford to buy these items, which we can consider a luxury, it means they have money," Bunye said in two separate radio interviews.

Bunye, however, ignored questions by broadcasters who suggested that Filipinos might be drinking more beer or sending more text messages on their mobile phones to forget their problems even for a short time.

The press secretary noted that beer giant San Miguel Corp. sold 174 million cases last year and sari-sari stores retailed more "cell cards" than vinegar, soy sauce and fish sauce.

Beer sales usually surge when the economy is good because farmers earn more from their harvest, according to Bunye. Beer sales go down if the economy is bad and the harvest is poor as farmers stick to the cheaper gin.

Bunye said Malacañang was

PALACE/ A8

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Visayas and Mindanao will have cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers becoming widespread over Eastern and Southern Mindanao. Northern and Eastern Luzon will experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers. The rest of the country will be partly cloudy to cloudy with isolated rainshowers.

COMPILED BY RAY LEYESA, PDI RESEARCH/01/13/05 SOURCE PAGASA

Second FRONTPAGE

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Metro Manila	Cloudy with Rains	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Cloudy with Rains	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Cloudy with Rains	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	Gen. Santos	Widespread Rains
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Partly Cloudy	Davao	Cloudy with Rains

MILF to probe Maguindanao raid

By Charlie C. Señase
and Edwin O. Fernandez
PDI Mindanao Bureau[

COTABATO CITY—The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Central Committee is now investigating its top field commanders who led the "unauthorized assault" on an Army detachment in Mamasapano, Maguindanao on Sunday which killed 17 MILF rebels and six soldiers.

MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu said MILF chief of staff Sammy Almanzor has summoned the two leaders of the attackers, Abdul Rahman Binago and Abdul Wahid Tundok, to appear before the MILF Central Committee and explain their side on the deadly attack.

The attack on an Army base of the 37th Infantry Battalion violated a 2002 ceasefire agreement between the government and the separatist rebels.

The government yesterday said it wants to punish Muslim rebel leaders who launched the attack on the Army outpost but Kabalu said the two rebel leaders would have to be investigated first.

"We want to bring the perpetrators to justice. And we hope the MILF will exert its authority over its commanders to yield any of the parties who have engaged in these depredations," said presidential palace spokesperson Silvestre Afable.

Afable said that although fighting had stopped, "the government will continue to take all means to bring the perpetrators to justice."

Both the government and the rebels have said the deadly assault would not hamper scheduled peace talks.

Kabalu said it was just proper for the accused to be heard before they are meted appropriate sanction by the Bangsamoro Armed Forces.

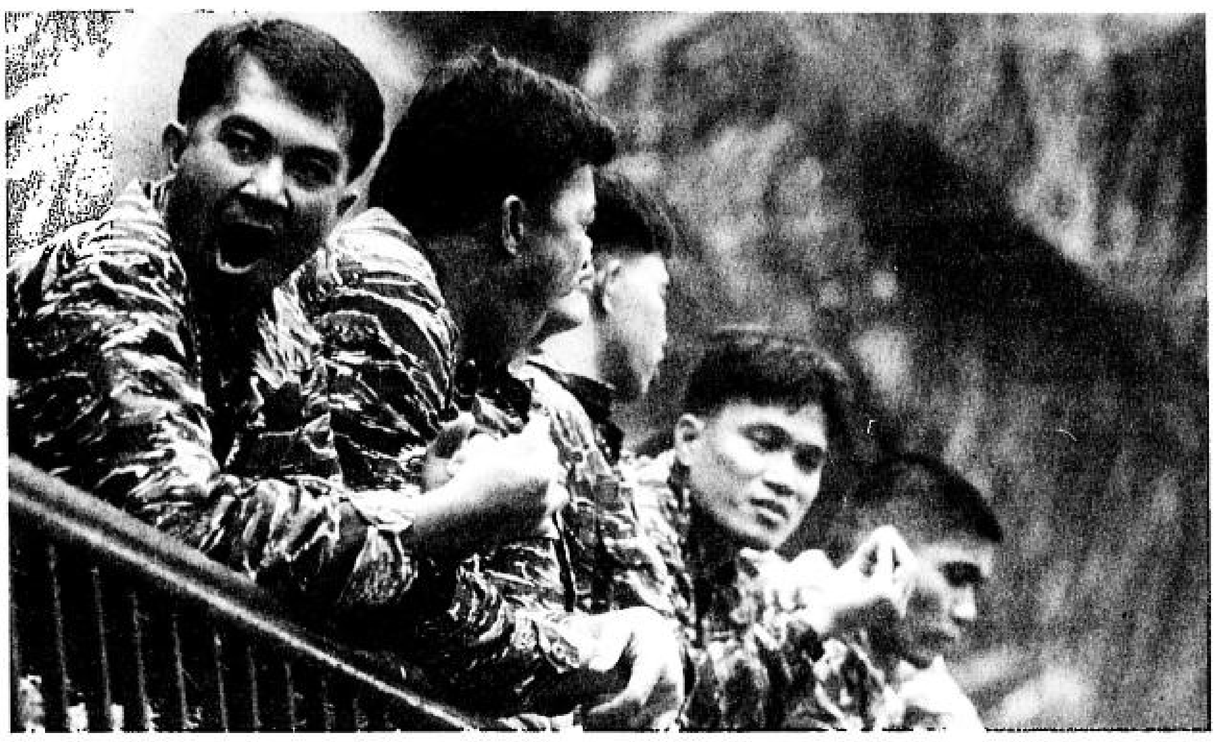
"We cannot reprimand or punish them immediately. The MILF is giving the two enough time to explain," Kabalu said, adding that the rebels were still awaiting an official request from the government for the two to be turned over.

Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Franklin del Prado, spokesperson of the Army's 6th Infantry Division, said "there is no conclusive evidence" that would support the report (not in the INQUIRER) that six soldiers were shot one after the other as they lay wounded during the attack on the army detachment.

Kabalu earlier said the attack was not sanctioned by the MILF and that the commanders assaulted the army outpost in apparent retaliation for the killing of Binago's brother, a bandit chief.

An international monitoring team, which includes members from Brunei, Libya and Malaysia, arrived at the scene to conduct an investigation but would not comment on the incident.

With AFP report



HO-HUM

While defense and prosecution lawyers fight it out in open court, one of the soldiers who staged the Oakwood mutiny in 2003 fail to suppress a yawn during yesterday's schedule arraignment at the general court-martial in Camp Aguinaldo. ***(See related story next page).***

JOAN BONDOC

MILF replaces head of ceasefire panel

THE SECESSIONIST Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) yesterday replaced the head of its ceasefire panel, two days after a 17-month truce was broken by heavy fighting between soldiers and separatist rebels.

Benjie Midtimbang, head of the MILF truce panel, announced his departure during a ceasefire meeting with government officials in Davao City, where both sides talked about ways to contain fighting in Maguindanao.

"We were surprised when he bid farewell," a senior military official in the government's truce panel told Reuters. "He introduced us to his replacement." Von al-Haq, head of the MILF's intelligence group, will take over from Midtimbang, who is expected to return to his former position as chief of the rebels' military academy.

MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu said the replacement of Midtimbang was not related to the heavy fighting on Sunday and Monday in Mamasapano town in Maguindanao.

"The decision to reorganize our ceasefire panel was made before fighting broke out in Mamasapano," Kabalu told Reuters.

"These changes are routine. The fighting was only a coincidence."

On Wednesday, government troops shelled rebel positions as another gun battle erupted in nearby Datu Saudi Ampatuan town, forcing 3,000 to 5,000 families to abandon their farms and homes to avoid getting caught in the crossfire.

Brig. Gen. Alexander Yano, head of government's truce panel, said they had asked the MILF to help troops arrest the leader of the rebel forces who overran an army outpost on Sunday night in Mamasapano town. *Reuters*

GMA asked to comment on Roces petition

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE PRESIDENTIAL Electoral Tribunal has asked President Macapagal-Arroyo to comment on the petition of actress Susan Roces to substitute for her late husband, actor Fernando Poe Jr., in the election protest case against her.

The tribunal on Tuesday issued a resolution directing the lawyers of Ms Arroyo to comment on Roces' petition within 10 days.

"The next action of the court will be determined after it receives the comment from the President," Associate Justice Artemio Panganiban said yesterday.

Roces on Monday asked the tribunal to allow her to substitute for Poe, adding that she possessed the "legal capacity and standing" to do so and that Poe's death on Dec. 14 did "not extinguish" the election protest against Ms Arroyo.

Poe, who ran but lost to Ms Arroyo, had claimed that he was cheated in the election return results from 10,554 precincts in seven provinces, one city, and seven municipalities and ballot results in 118,339 precincts from 42 cities and provinces.

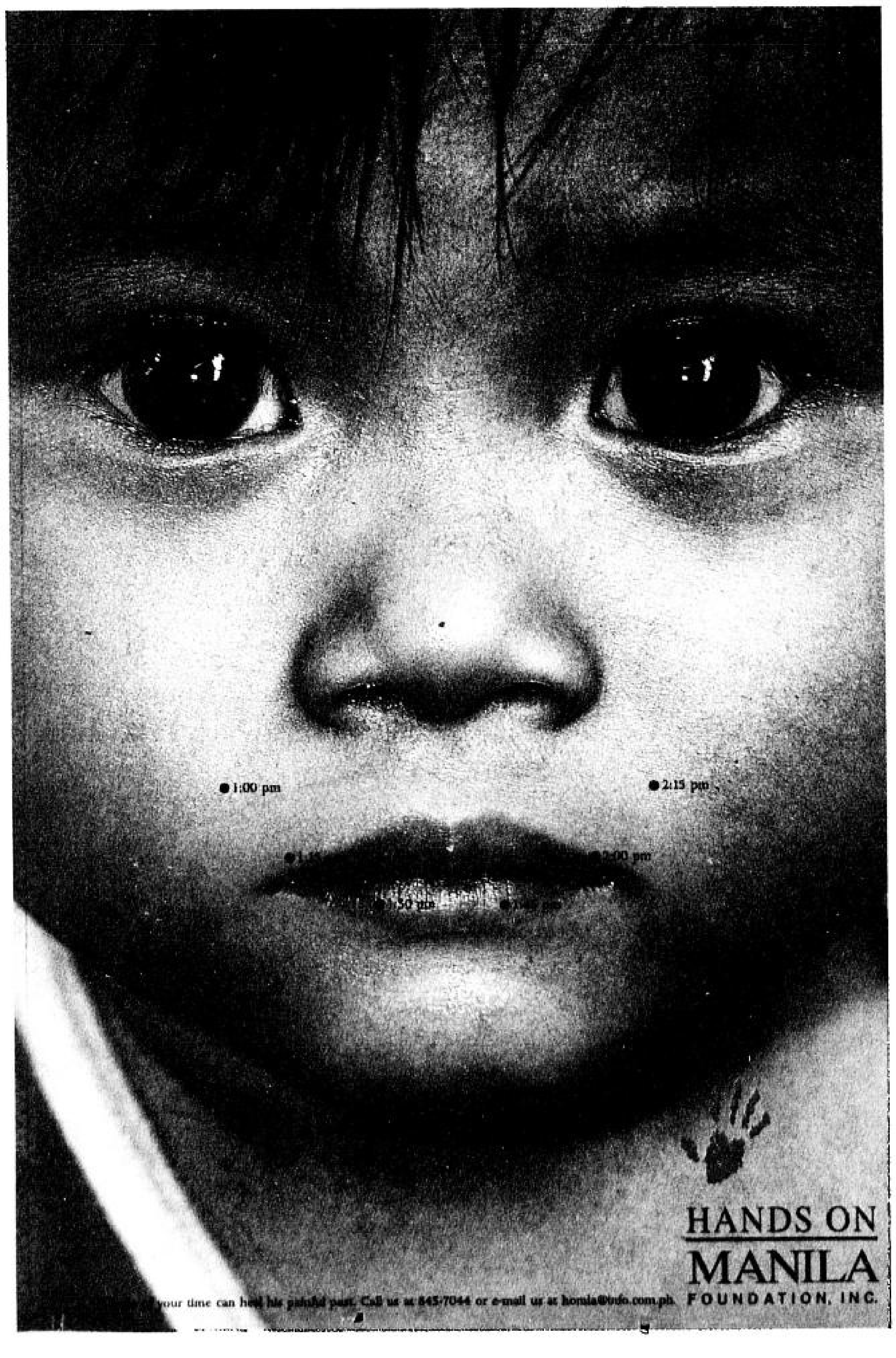
Panganiban said this was the first time that the PET had received a petition for substitution in an election protest for a presidential race.

"In so far as the PET (is concerned), this is the first time, but the (House of Representatives Electoral Tribunal or the HRET) has already taken up a case like that and so has the Supreme Court in a number of election cases in the past," he said.

Panganiban said that the court would rule "promptly" on Roces' petition once it hears from both parties and due process has been satisfied.

"The court always rules promptly on cases. Sometimes, the rulings are delayed because of the necessity of due process. We have to hear both sides and hear them well before we render judgement. The primary duty of the court is to render judgement only after due process," he said.

Romulo Macalintal, Ms Arroyo's lawyer, earlier said that Roces could not substitute for her husband because that would have "no legal basis."



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Gov't to appeal Piatco ruling, wants new judge

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE GOVERNMENT will ask the Supreme Court to overturn a Pasay City judge's ruling ordering the government to pay $62.34 million to the consortium that built the expropriated Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 3, said Solicitor General Alfredo Benipayo.

It will also ask the high tribunal to inhibit Judge Henrick Gingoyon from hearing the case for being "too biased," Benipayo said.

The government will seek today a temporary restraining order from the SC to overturn Gingoyon's Jan. 4 ruling and to stop the Philippine Air Terminals Co. from withdrawing the $62.34 million from the Land Bank of the Philippines.

Piatco's owners will be "laughing all the way to the bank" if that money is released, Benipayo said in a telephone interview.

Even before the government could go to the SC, however, representatives of Piatco were already at the Baclaran branch of Landbank early yesterday where they tried, but failed, to withdraw the money.

Marife Vallada, a lawyer for Piatco, said she and five Piatco employees had gone to the bank to prepare the papers for the withdrawal of the money which is to be done by Vic Cheng Yong, the Piatco president and chair.

But Vallada said the bank's assistant manager, Cinfa Malto, told her that she should deal with the bank's legal department.

Vallada and the Piatco employees had to wait for half an hour before being allowed to enter the bank by security guards.

Gingoyon of the Pasay City Regional Trial Court on Jan. 4 ordered the government to make a partial payment of $62.34 million to Piatco after the court issued a writ of possession allowing the government to take over the disputed terminal.

The money was to be taken from the provisional deposit that the government made with the court when it filed the case of expropriation against Piatco.

Benipayo immediately filed motions asking Gingoyon to reverse his decision and for the judge to inhibit himself from the case. The judge rejected these motions on Tuesday.

Yesterday, Benipayo said the government would ask the high tribunal to inhibit Gingoyon for having allegedly "prejudged" the case, particularly on the issue of just compensation to be paid to Piatco.

He wondered how Piatco could have learned of the lower court's order so soon when before authorities were hard put to serve summonses on Piatco.

"Only moments after the presiding judge issued the order on Jan. 4, a lawyer for Piatco was scurrying to serve the same upon the Landbank in Baclaran," Benipayo said.

"How the Piatco lawyer came to know the issuance of such order, when previously Piatco could not be served with summons, remains a spellbinding mystery," said Benipayo.

Benipayo said that Gingoyon's order was "irregular," noting that Piatco had not asked the court for the release of the money from the Landbank.

He said the money should have been released only after the court had determined the just compensation to be paid to Piatco and after the government had carried out a thorough inspection of the terminal to find out if it was safe to operate.

With a report from Nancy Carvajal

'Missing' officer not missing, says lawyer

By Philip C. Tubeza

The "missing" suspected coup plotter, Lt. Col. Oscarlito P. Mapalo, is still "detained" in Camp Aguinaldo, his counsel said yesterday.

Lawyer Homobono Adaza said yesterday that Mapalo was still inside the military camp despite the Armed Forces' claim that he escaped his military custodians on Dec. 21.

"Have they searched every building in Camp Aguinaldo? He's still there and he can't get out because he will be arrested," Adaza said.

He said he had contact with Mapalo through his cell phone and that the officer was still inside the military camp.

Adaza spoke after the Court of Appeals Sixth Division held a hearing on his petition for a writ of habeas corpus in behalf of Mapalo. The court reset the hearing to Monday after its order for the Armed Forces of the Philippines to produce Mapalo reached the AFP only last Tuesday.

Capt. Marlon Dayao, of the Judge Advocate General's Office (Jago), informed the court that Mapalo had escaped and was told to formally explain to the court what happened on Monday.

Justice Conrado Vasquez Jr. inquired how the court's order reached the Jago only on Tuesday. He said this was the second time that the National Bureau of Investigation served late an order from the court in a habeas corpus case.

"It would seem that they do not see the urgency of habeas corpus proceedings. We would just like to protect the idea of habeas corpus," Vasquez said.

Palace eyes amnesty for Oakwood mutineers

By Gil Cabacungan Jr.

MALACAÑANG yesterday said it might consider granting amnesty for the jailed rebel soldiers in the Oakwood mutiny if there is a strong public clamor for their pardon.

In a phone interview with reporters, Communication Director Silvestre Afable said: " If there is a groundswell of support especially from important institutions, then I guess it's time for the government to follow it closely with political leaders if this is possible."

Afable stressed that granting amnesty to the Oakwood mutineers has not yet been discussed at the "political level" although appeals for their amnesty have been forwarded to the Palace.

Leaders of the Catholic Church—Cebu Archbishop Ricardo Cardinal Vidal and Davao Archbishop Fernando Capalla—and the country's biggest business group—the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry—have recently submitted their separate appeals for amnesty to the Oakwood mutineers.

But Afable said granting the Oakwood mutineers amnesty would take time because existing rules on the grant of pardon cover only rebel groups such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the New People's Army.

"This is a relatively new thing in the amnesty program. We are trying to gauge the political situation, the temper and sentiment of political leaders and we will act accordingly," Afable said.

The 300 soldiers involved in the mutiny have been in detention for the last 17 months. Thirty-one are charged with coup d'etat before the Makati Regional Trial Court while 267 face charges of mutiny, failure to suppress a mutiny, disrespect to the President, and conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman before a military court.

INDICTMENT OF LAW ENFORCERS

Cuenco fumes over sloppy handling of big drug cases

By Carlito Pablo

AN ADMINISTRATION congressman has asked the justice department to investigate the allegedly "slipshod" manner in which government authorities have handled the high-profile illegal drug cases last year and to purge the officials responsible.

According to Cebu City Rep. Antonio Cuenco (Lakas), vice chair of the House oversight committee on dangerous drugs, of the 21 raids of shabu laboratories and drug storage facilities carried out in 2004, only one led to the filing of criminal cases against suspected laboratory owners and drug syndicate masterminds.

"Is this an inadvertent mistake of our law enforcement agents? A mere lapse of our country's prosecutors? Is there a sleight of hand by the masterminds? And in all these 20 cases?" asked Cuenco.

He noted that the one raid that led to the actual filing of criminal charges was the one that involved a shabu laboratory in Mandaue City in Cebu province, which was raided on Sept. 24, 2004.

Charges have been filed against 11 people—nine of them foreigners—who were arrested in the raid that netted 675 kg of shabu worth at least P1.3 billion.

The alleged mastermind, Calvin de Jesus Tan, escaped to Hong Kong but was eventually arrested there. The government is now trying to get him extradited.

"I am enraged why the remaining cases, mostly in Metro Manila, did not include the filing of raps against owners of these laboratories and facilities when they are clearly liable as accomplices at the very least," Cuenco said.

He noted that the Mandaue laboratory that was dismantled by authorities was one of the biggest not only in the Philippines but also in Southeast Asia.

"Here in Manila and elsewhere, we do not only fail to implead them (the alleged masterminds), some names were even reported to have been expunged from the list," Cuenco said.

Cuenco noted that these are "glaring procedural blunders committed by our criminal justice system which include not only drug enforcement agents but also the prosecutors."

He urged the justice department to "immediately probe this matter and purge their ranks."

"These slipshod prosecutors and rogue drug enforcement agents deserve not only outright dismissal and forfeiture of benefits and perpetual disqualification from government service but the gravest penalties we can apply from our existing statutes," Cuenco said.

Cuenco warned that unless the government implements a serious campaign against drug syndicates, "we may just wake one day to discover that we have already become another Colombia."

He suggested the government "use the Cebu style of prosecuting drug cases, if Manila lacks one or if it wants a reinforced model in dealing with these cases."

The 21 high-profile busts in 2004 led to the seizure of P8.3 billion worth of shabu, or methamphetamine hydrochloride.

The raids also led to the confiscation of various chemicals and shabu precursors and equipment for shabu manufacture.

The Philippines has earned the dubious distinction of being one of the biggest transshipment points of shabu in the world.

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Luisita farmer accuses Noynoy's supporters

From page A1

George Loveland, one of the wounded victims, testified during a Senate inquiry initiated by opposition Senators Jinggoy Estrada, chair of the Senate committee on labor and Jamby Madrigal, chair of the Senate committee on youth, women and family relations.

POLICE officials take their oath before testifying on the Hacienda Luisita's violent dispersal before the joint hearing of the Senate committees on labor and youth, women and family relations. JESS YUSON

VICTIM of the Hacienda Luisita strikers' dispersal on Jan. 5, George Loveland, testifies at the joint Senate committee hearing. JESS YUSON

Absurd

Aquino described the accusation as "absurd" when reached by the INQUIRER yesterday.

"It's true I have bodyguards. But they did not shoot anybody. Not even during the coup attempts during the time of my mother (President Corazon Aquino) did they shoot anybody," he said.

Violence earlier erupted at the Hacienda Luisita, a large sugar estate owned by Ms Aquino's family, following a deadlock in collective bargaining between the sugar workers' union and management. At least seven workers were killed and scores of others were injured during a picketline dispersal involving soldiers and policemen on Nov. 16 last year.

Witness account

Loveland gave the following account of the latest clash in Filipino:

Three days earlier, or on Jan. 2, about 20 protesting workers were then manning the picket line. Suddenly, at about 10:40 p.m., a Nissan Patrol with license plate No. TLA-119, with Aquino's men on board entered the hacienda.

One of them asked for his name, then advised him and other workers to agree to a settlement. He also told me to be careful.

At about 11 p.m. on Jan. 5, he saw the same vehicle leaving the estate.

When the unidentified passengers rolled down the van's window, all hell broke loose.

The man who earlier talked with him started cursing the picketers as he and his companions alighted from the vehicle.

He approached me and struck my head with his gun, which exploded. I was the first one to be shot.

While the picketers ran for their lives, policemen who were in the vicinity did not do anything. They were just watching us.

One of the gunmen even went back and opened fire at one of the protesters. But I know them. And their vehicle has the same plate number.

Under questioning by Estrada, Loveland said he could not recall the type of guns used because "it was dark."

Aquino reaction

Aquino said he welcomed "the opportunity to answer in any forum this absurd charge."

"If I were contemplating a crime, perhaps the first thing I would do in planning it would be to ensure that I get scot-free after committing the crime," he said.

"It would patently absurd for me to advertise the fact na *babaril kami at gagamitin ang sasakyan at mga tauhan ko na kilala sa publiko. Hindi lang ako* murderer *kundi tanga pa.* (we'll shoot or use a vehicle and men who are known to the public. I won't only be called a murderer but also an imbecile.)"

Addressing the witness, Aquino said: "Since I am not a party to his shooting in any manner, shape or form whatsoever, even a casual investigation as to his assertion will reveal its utmost absurdity."

Police shocked

Loveland's testimony shocked police officials present during the inquiry.

Senior Supt. Angelo Sunglao, police director in Tarlac, said he would look into the allegations although he told Estrada that the PNP had already stopped the investigation "because the family of the late victim requested the NBI (National Bureau of Investigation) to further conduct the probe so they decided to supply all the information needed."

Sunglao said that after the latest clash, "initially, six police (officers) assigned at the gate near the area had been relieved."

Four of them "were sleeping and two were awake because it was on rotation basis," he said. "They have to divide the time because we are only augmenting the blue guards of the Hacienda. In fact it was not really our police duty to man that gate."

But Loveland insisted that the policemen were wide awake. "They did not respond even when a negotiation was ongoing which could have prevented the incident. They went near the area after the shooting incident."

Sunglao disclosed that the Nissan Patrol was registered to a certain Efren delos Santos, of 8197 Yabut Circle, Gaudalupe, Makati City.

Delos Santos and several people, identified only as John and Jane Does, have been charged with multiple frustrated homicide case on Jan. 7.

'Deliberate, intentional'

Loveland's testimony preceded the formal submission of an executive report on the Nov. 16, 2004 clash involving striking workers, policemen and soldiers.

Dr. Gene Nisperos, one of the volunteer doctors of the nongovernment Health Alliance for Democracy (HEAD), told the Senate committees that the attack on the strikers, which left seven people dead and 121 others, including 11 children, injured, was "deliberate and intentional."

A report submitted by the HEAD and the Health Action for Human Rights, which are composed of volunteer doctors, nurses and medical students, said the shooting did not occur as a "defensive stance or because the PNP or AFP were provoked but rather as a direct armed offensive assault on the picket."

Nisperos said that all fatalities died from "frontal" bullet wounds, except for two who died from wounds in the back and or in the side of their bodies.

"There was also clear excessive use of force," said Nisperos. "The gunshot wounds were sustained not from a single volley of fire but from a sustained gunfire lasting up to two minutes."

How much?

Just how much is the life of a 'sakada' farmer?

This question was raised by Madrigal during the hearing after she was informed that the Cojuangco family had yet to help the victims of the dispersal.

"It's just a moral question," said Madrigal, who noted that the victims could not wait any longer for any resolution from the courts, Senate or the labor department.

Social Welfare Undersecretary Alicia Bala, replied: "P5,000."

Bala, however, said the local government in Tarlac was giving P23,000 to each of the families of the seven fatalities, although the amount would not be fully given in cash.

Besides the P5,000, the DSWD also provided help, such as food, discounts for medicine and funeral expenses, among others, she said.

"But is P23,000 enough to pay for a life of a farmer?" asked Madrigal.

Feudal lords and serfs

She then directed the question to lawyer Adison Castro, counsel for the sugar estate, saying since the sugar plantation was being run like a feudal estate, "the feudal lords should give renumerations to their serfs."

Castro said he was "not competent to answer" the question.

"Why don't you see it in your hearts to help the fatalities? These are *sakadas* as you call them. They died in the line of duty," said Madrigal. ***With a report from Carlito Pablo***

SANDIGANBAYAN Special Division Justices Francisco H.Villaruz Jr., Teresita J. Leonardo-de Castro and Diosdado M. Peralta preside over the hearing on the Estrada motion for a six-day extension of his stay in Hong Kong, which is subsequently withdrawn by his lawyers. MITCH MAURICIO

NOT so fast... the Supreme Court gives Sandiganbayan Justice Edilberto Sandoval 10 days to substantiate the health reasons that he cited for his resignation as member of the Special Division. VAL HANDUMON

SC orders Sandoval to get back to work—but no longer as chair

By Philip C. Tubeza
and Armand Dean Nocum

WHAT now, Mr. Suave?

Senior Justice Edilberto Sandoval, known for his "Mr. Suave" ring tone, is no longer chair of the special division hearing former President Joseph Estrada's plunder and perjury cases, but he is still its member.

The Supreme Court yesterday appointed Sandiganbayan Presiding Justice Teresita Leonardo de Castro as chair of the special division two days after Sandoval submitted his "irrevocable resignation" as its head and member.

But the high court gave him 10 days to substantiate his claim that his deteriorating health was preventing him from performing his job at the special division.

"In the meantime, he shall continue to sit as member of the special division," the Supreme Court said in a two-page resolution.

The court declared De Castro new chair of the special division because President Macapagal-Arroyo had appointed her presiding justice of the Sandiganbayan on Dec. 15, 2004.

Davide speaks

The tribunal "informed" Sandoval that its order creating the special division had also decreed that the Sandiganbayan presiding justice should be the division chair.

"Since he was designated only as chair of the special division when he was acting presiding justice, the regular presiding justice should now take over," Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. said at a luncheon with reporters in Manila.

"We did not act on his resignation as member until he'll be able to submit enough proof of his inability to serve as member of the special division. At the same time, we directed the new presiding justice to immediately assume as chair of the special division," Davide said.

Sandoval acted as the presiding justice of the antigraft court last year when Sandigan Justice Minita Chico-Nazario was appointed to the Supreme Court.

Member only, not chair

"He was directed to remain as member only. He is not the chair anymore. He should have relinquished that chair last December when the appointment of the regular presiding justice of the Sandiganbayan was made by the President," said Associate Justice Artemio Panganiban, who was also at the luncheon.

Request for relief

Panganiban said Sandoval could face sanctions if he defied the Supreme Court. However, he declined to comment whether Sandoval would be disciplined for not relinquishing the chairmanship of the special division earlier, adding that the whole court might still take up this particular issue.

Panganiban said the high court was treating Sandoval's letter as "a request for relief" from his assignment and not as letter of irrevocable resignation.

He explained that Sandoval could not resign from the special division because that was "a specific assignment" from the high court.

"One resigns only from positions in the government but one does not resign from an assignment specifically made by the Supreme Court," Panganiban said.

"He was assigned to that job or that work. He cannot just give it up, in his words, irrevocably. One does not resign irrevocably from an assignment," he added.

Panganiban added that the high court did not consider the alleged flip-flopping of Sandoval's colleagues in the special division when it reviewed his resignation letter since the only reason cited by Sandoval for his resignation was his worsening health condition.

Lost neutrality

"All he mentioned was his alleged deteriorating health condition. But the court felt that was not duly substantiated as yet so the court did not act on his request for relief from the assignment," Panganiban said.

While the Supreme Court wants Sandoval to stay on as member of the special division while awaiting his explanation that his health is preventing him from performing his assignment, defense lawyers don't want him back.

"Our consensus is that someone who has issued statements that apparently show a great deal of animosity and hostility to the accused may have lost the cold neutrality of an impartial judge," lead defense counsel Rene Saguisag said in an interview following a hearing at the Sandiganbayan.

The hearing was called by De Castro, with Associate Justices Francisco Villaruz and Diosdado Peralta as members.

Peralta stood in for Sandoval, who was reportedly sick at the Sandiganbayan clinic when the hearing started.

In announcing his resignation as chair and member of the special division, Sandoval also hit the alleged flip-flopping on the part of his colleagues on Estrada's house arrest and trip to Hong Kong for knee operation. Sandoval was the lone dissenter on both resolutions.

Approves Jinggoy trip

Saguisag said Sandoval should now "inhibit" from the case if it was true that the marathon hearings were making him sickly.

At the hearing, De Castro put off the scheduled presentation of defense witnesses until after the antigraft court shall have gotten an order from the high tribunal on Sandoval's letter of resignation.

But De Castro approved Sen. Jinggoy Estrada's trip to Hong Kong to accompany his father home. The young Estrada was scheduled to leave last night. They were to return home on Saturday.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Thursday, January 13, 2005
1st Week in Ordinary Time

1st Reading: Heb 3:7-14
Gospel: Mark 1:40-45

A leper came to Jesus and begged him, "If you so will, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." The leprosy left the man at once and he was made clean. As Jesus sent the man away, he sternly warned him, "Don't tell anyone about this, but go and show yourself to the priest and for the cleansing bring the offering ordered by Moses; in this way you will make your declaration."

However, as soon as the man went out, he began spreading the news everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter any town. But even though he stayed in the rural areas, people came to him from everywhere.

Commentary

THIS is the second story of a leper we have heard in two weeks time. Now Jesus is described as filled with pity for the plight of the man who stands before him. And he touches him but tells him, go to the authorities and be declared clean so that he might rejoin society. But the man instead begins to announce to anyone who will listen that Jesus touched him! And in so doing he makes Jesus as unclean in the society as he had been. Now Jesus can't go openly into towns, but people are so desperate that they will ignore the taboo of untouchability and go out to Jesus in the desert. Those who are obviously sinners or who cannot hide their predicaments or situations call forth pity from Jesus. And what about us—what do such desperate people call forth from us? Have we tried to touch anyone in such need?

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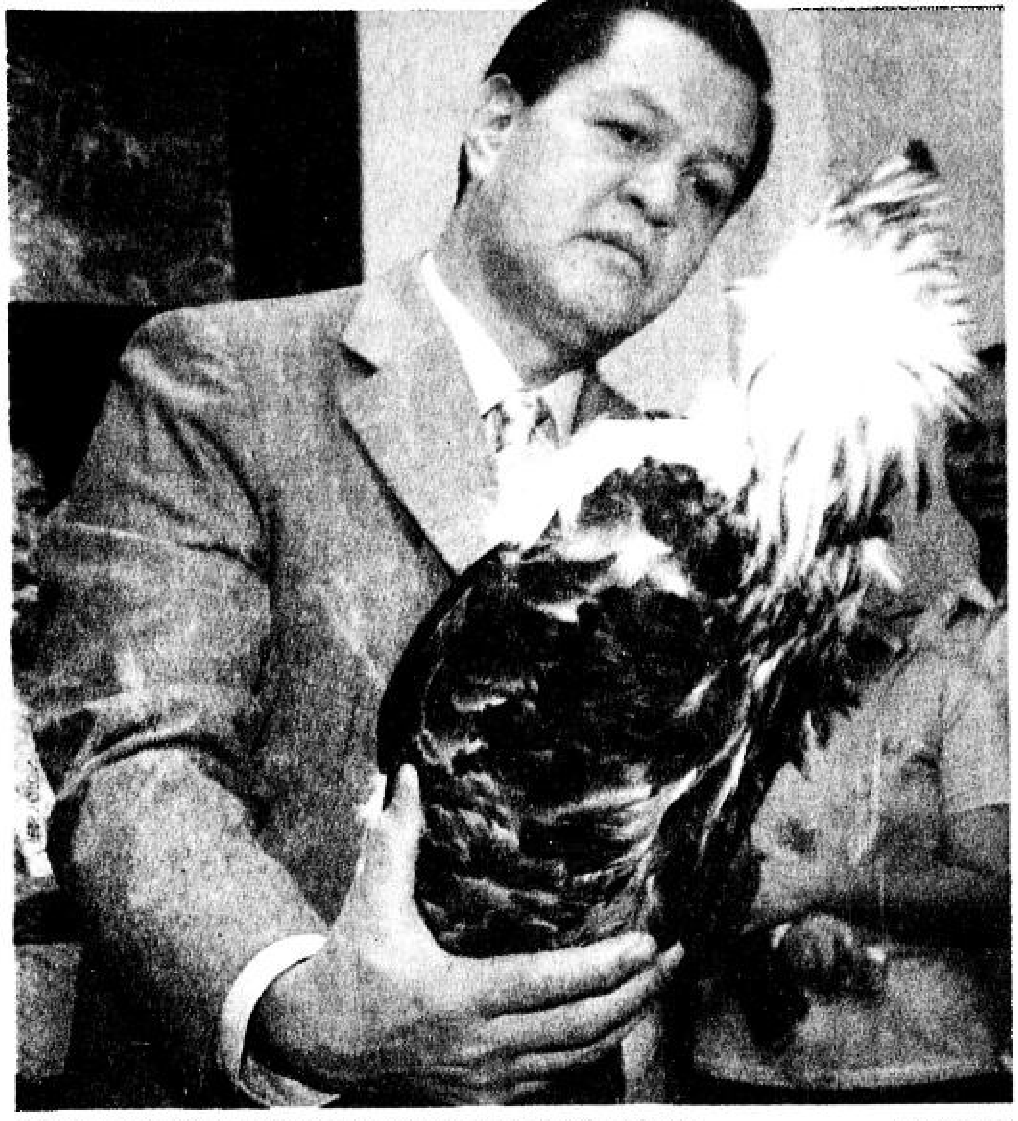

VICE President Noli de Castro with dead adopted eagle Kabayan. EGAY MONTANA

Noli mourns 'Kabayan,' will adopt new RP eagle

By Jerome Aning

VICE President Noli de Castro yesterday said he was willing to sponsor the nurturing of another Philippine eagle despite the death of his adopted eagle "Kabayan" which died on Saturday at the Philippine Eagle Foundation release site in Mount Apo, Davao.

"I am sorry that this incident occurred to the young eagle Kabayan. Much has been done to achieve a breakthrough with regard to the conservation of Philippine Eagles," De Castro said in a statement.

Kabayan was reportedly electrocuted after perching on a high-voltage power line at the Mount Apo National Park.

The Vice President said Kabayan's death should not be seen as a setback to the PEF's efforts in preserving endangered species but should urge more environmentalists to participate in conservation.

"As for me, I am more than eager to sponsor another eagle and to finally see more Philippine Eagles in the wild and not be endangered anymore," De Castro said.

The eagle got its name from De Castro's monicker when he was still a newsman. The Vice President adopted Kabayan more than two years ago and sponsored all the eagle's food and maintenance expenses up to the time of its release in April last year.

De Castro underlined the contribution made by his adopted eagle in terms of the experimental release project of the PEF. He pointed out that there were many Philippine eagles in captivity under PEF's care that have yet to be released into the wild so that they could finally adapt to their natural environment.

The official urged the PEF to use what they have learned from Kabayan in their future experimental projects.

He said that since the PEF has seen and observed the ways of a captive-bred Philippine Eagle like Kabayan, it was now more equipped and capable to nurture and protect endangered species in their experimental releases.

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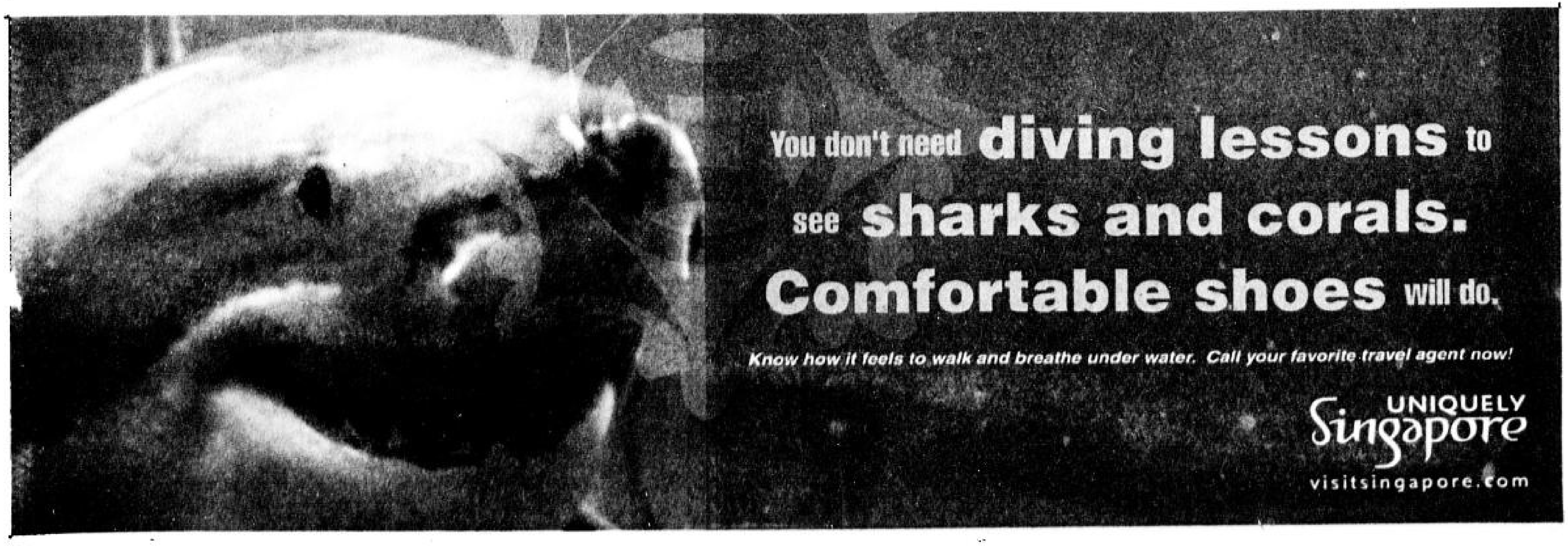
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THE MANILA CATHEDRAL: Destination for pilgrimage

Manila Cathedral as tourist attraction

By Blanche S. Rivera

FOR NOW it looms old and quiet over the city, standing as it did for centuries. But this year, the Manila Metropolitan Cathedral in Intramuros could be buzzing with people from all over the world.

The 400-year-old church, ravaged by at least six earthquakes and a world war and rebuilt eight times, is being prepared to become a destination for pilgrims seeking an encounter with the Our Lady of Immaculate Conception.

Msgr. Nestor Cerbo, rector of the cathedral, said he would launch a pilgrim and tourist ministry early this year to use the cathedral's worldwide fame for Christian evangelization.

The cathedral is the only church in the Philippines that has been elevated to Minor Basilica of the Immaculate Conception through the personal initiative of Pope John Paul II.

It has hosted the most important events in the country's religious history, including the installation of Cardinal Rufino Santos, the first Filipino Cardinal, and the visits of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II.

The original Manila Cathedral was a nipa hut built by a Dominican, Fray Domingo de Salazar, the first bishop of the diocese of Manila, in 1581, or 50 years after the Spaniards came to Philippine shores.

The wooden church was burned down in 1583, was rebuilt, then destroyed by a hurricane in 1588. The first stone cathedral was hit by an earthquake in 1599, and even while it was still being repaired, several earthquakes from the 17th to the 18th centuries destroyed whatever improvements had been made. The seventh cathedral was bombed during the Liberation of Manila in 1945.

"It stands for the Philippine church. People all over the world know about it. It is not just a place for tourists, to feed people's curiosity," Cerbo told the INQUIRER in an interview.

"We want people to look at the cathedral not just as a building but (also) as a structure that symbolizes the faith of the Filipinos. The cathedral tells the story of the Filipino people's Christianity, how it spread in the country," Cerbo said.

Cerbo noted that many travel agencies bring tourists to the cathedral as part of their itinerary in Manila, the nation's capital. The cathedral has become a must-see for foreigners who want a feel of the old Manila.

Cerbo said some of the tours even adjust their schedules so that the foreign vistors can attend Mass and chat briefly with him.

The rector also placed donation boxes all over the cathedral because visitors would often ask him where to put their offerings or simply leave them in inconspicuous parts of the church.

"Sometimes, we would find money tucked in the statues of the saints. It's interesting, I didn't know there were many foreigners who visited the cathedral until I saw the many different currencies," Cerbo said.

Judging by the currencies, the cathedral has had visitors from Argentina, China, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Mexico, Brazil, United States, Canada, Singapore, the United Kingdom and other European countries, and even some parts of Africa.

These foreign guests would be the target of the cathedral's pilgrim and tourist ministry. While many of the visitors are Christians, there were also curious Buddhists and Muslims.

"These are not just people from all walks of life, but people from all kinds of faith... We want to minister to tourists so that their visit here will not just be for taking pictures but for being involved in a spiritual encounter," he said.

Cerbo said the pilgrim and tourist ministry was in accordance with the instructions of retired Manila Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin, who appointed him rector of the cathedral in 2002.

Sin, he said, told him to make the cathedral a model for all the churches in the Philippines and a venue for the social mission of the Catholic Church.

The Cardinal, who headed the archdiocese of Manila for 29 years, also stressed that the cathedral was "not a tourist destination but a place of encounter, a dwelling place of God and His people."

Cerbo said that as a shrine for pilgrims, the cathedral would have a team of knowledgeable people who will tour the visitors and orient them on the history of the cathedral and the Catholic Church in the Philippines.

The priest, however, was still looking for people who would be trained to handle pilgrims and educated in the Catholic Church's history.

Cerbo said he is also thinking of coming up with CDs and computer terminals that will make information on the cathedral immediately accessible to the visitors.

The Manila Cathedral launched its website last Dec. 8 to coincide with the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Cerbo is also raising funds for the major repairs and restoration needed in the cathedral, which is estimated to cost at least P13 million.

He said the cracks and rust destroying the adobe and steel structure supporting the cathedral could be dangerous if neglected in a few more years.

"God will provide," Cerbo said when asked where the money for the repairs will be sourced.

"People are really concerned about this cathedral. We will not let it go to ruin," he said.

The present structure of the Manila Cathedral will be 50 years old in 2008, another half century added to the glory of its past, a past which may not be quiet for long.

Lawyer who ratted on Marcos kills self

MIAMI—Richard Hirschfeld, a colorful confidant of boxing champ Muhammad Ali who implicated late dictator Ferdinand Marcos in a plot to return to power, killed himself in jail on Tuesday. He had spent most of the last eight years as a fugitive from the federal government.

Hirschfeld, 57, died on the same day authorities told his attorney that final arrangements had been made to move him to Norfolk, Virginia, for trial. He had been on the lam for more than eight years until he was arrested in October in a closet at a lavish riverfront home in Fort Lauderdale.

Paramedics were called to the jail, and Hirschfeld was pronounced dead a short time later at a hospital, said US Bureau of Prisons spokesperson Trish O'Steen. Authorities would not say how he killed himself.

"It was a real shock to us," said attorney Alvin Entin. "He seemed much more of a fighter than a person that had those kind of mood swings."

Hirschfeld accompanied Ali to the Middle East in 1985 in a highly publicized attempt to gain the release of American hostages in Lebanon. They later had a falling out over the legal rights to the boxer's life story.

Although Ali denied it, federal prosecutors claimed Hirschfeld imitated the boxer's voice on lobbying phone calls to US senators in the 1980s when the lawyer was driving a Rolls-Royce and living on a 50-acre (20-hectare) Virginia farm with the retired boxer.

Hirschfeld was representing ousted Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos when he secretly recorded their conversations about a plot for Marcos to regain power. Hirschfeld took the tapes to a congressional committee in 1987.

Hirschfeld was convicted of tax evasion and securities fraud charges in 1991, and was wanted on federal conspiracy charges when he was captured last year. He faced up to 70 years in prison.

The conspiracy charges covered a scheme to be furloughed from prison after the 1991 convictions. *AP*

DOH going door-to-door on birth control campaign

By Blanche S. Rivera

THE P100-MILLION door-to-door family planning campaign of the Department of Health will push through next month to educate some two million target couples on responsible parenthood.

The campaign, dubbed Ligtas-Buntis 2005, would run from Feb. 21 to March 25. It will entail the deployment of at least 15,000 health workers who will go from barangay to barangay, starting with the poorest families.

This is the first time the government has embarked on an education campaign on family planning, applying the strategies used during the past Ligtas-Tigdas campaigns.

The DOH announced yesterday that it was partnering with party-list group and population management advocate ALAGAD, a vocal critic of the government's natural family planning program, for the unprecedented campaign.

ALAGAD, a known promoter of artificial methods, would join the Ligtas-Buntis campaign to ensure that the government makes good on the agreement to educate couples on both natural and artificial family planning methods.

"We will send as many members (as possible) to partner with the health workers to make sure that the government goes by the agreement and that contraceptives reach the target couples," ALAGAD party-list Rep. Rodante Marcoleta said in a press briefing yesterday.

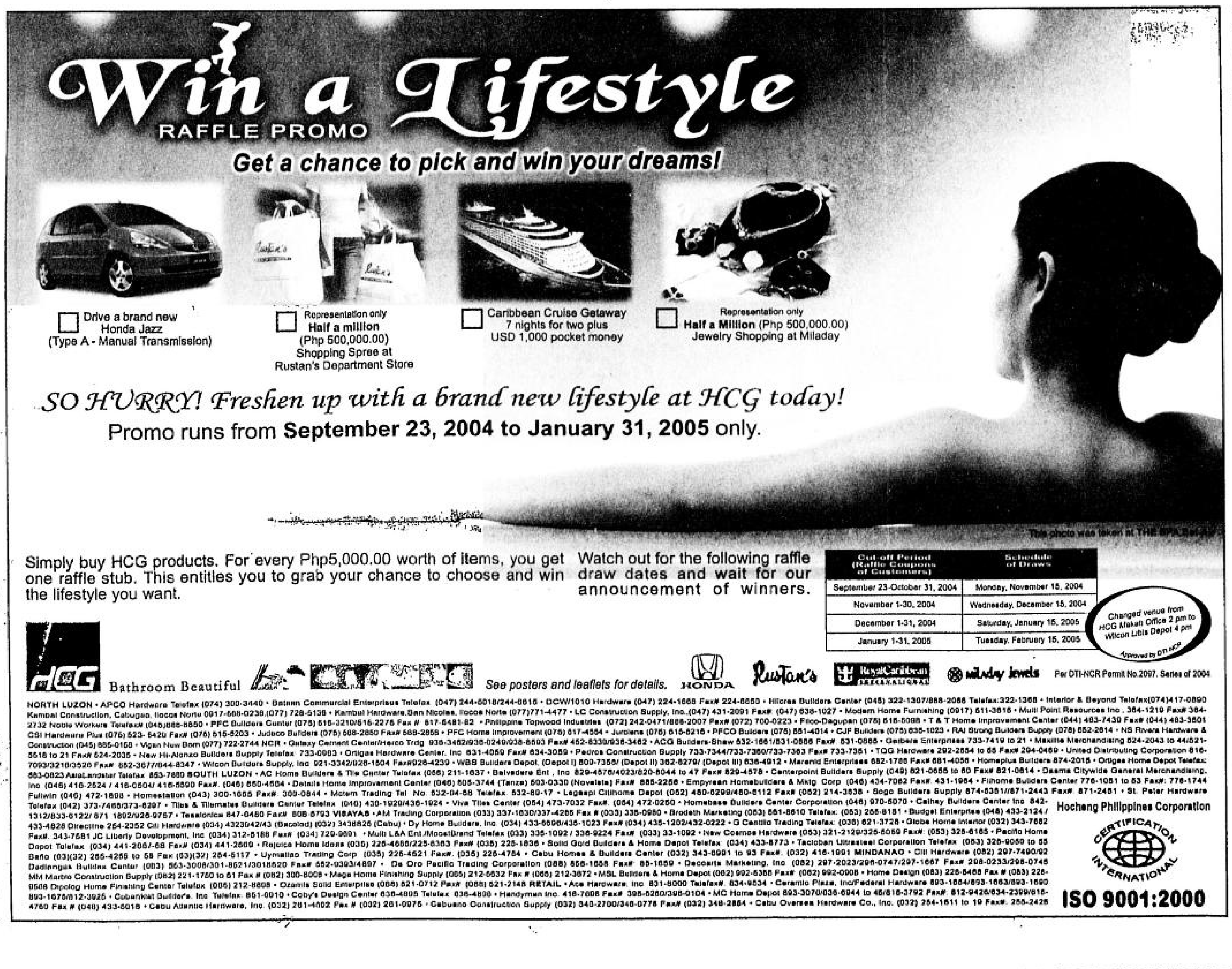
Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit said that while the national government would not buy contraceptives for the campaign, it would allow the distribution of some P100 million worth of contraceptives, mostly pills, in its warehouses.

The contraceptives were donations from international agencies like the USAID and the UNFPA.

Dayrit said that 25 to 29 local government units have also expressed their willingness to buy contraceptives to be given away to their constituents who prefer artificial family planning.

ALAGAD, which claims a membership of six million poor Filipinos nationwide, would help in identifying the unmet need in family planning and targeting these couples.

Studies have shown the unmet need in the Philippines is around 30 percent, or some 2.5 million women who want to limit their childbirths or space their children but do not know how.



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Firm policy on population pressed

THE JOINT Foreign Chambers of Commerce have urged the Arroyo government to adopt a firmer population management policy to curb the rapid population growth from the current average of 2.36 percent to 1.9 percent sooner than 2010.

In a statement, the foreign chambers observed that no country has achieved developed economic status with a rapidly-growing population. It noted that for the last three decades, a miniscule increase in per capita income has meant the country's poverty rate remains one of the highest in Asia.

"If the population growth rate continues unchanged, the current estimated 2004 population of 84 million will reach 100 million by 2011 and double to 165 million by 2033," the statement said.

"Extensive poverty means weak consumer demand, underdeveloped human resources, low public sector revenue and possible social and political unrest, conditions which discourage new business investment," it added.

Congress on track for ₱80-B goal, says House leader

By Cynthia D. Balana and Carlito Pablo

ABOUT P65 billion of the P80 billion new revenues being targeted out of four proposed new tax measures can now be attained, with the House of Representatives rushing the approval of a fifth bill increasing the value added tax to 12 percent.

Representatives from the majority bloc said the House was on track with its priority tax measures and saw no need for changes in its tax revenue agenda.

"We don't want to be misled by the number of tax bills since we are now looking at tangible amounts already," said Tarlac Rep. Jesli Lapus, chair of the House ways and means committee.

The P80-billion target was no longer a dream or a number in the air but realizable, as indicated by all projections, said Lapus.

The P65 billion new revenues will come mainly from the "sin" tax, the lateral attrition bill, rationalization of fiscal incentives and tax amnesty bills which make up a part of the administration's eight-fold tax revenue package.

Bicameral

The sin tax bill is now with bicameral conference committee which is trying to reconcile the Senate and the House versions of the measure.

Lapus said the bill increasing by two percent the present 10 percent VAT, once approved, would complete the picture and thus meet the total fund requirement.

Earlier, Malacañang said that instead of pursuing the passage of the eight tax measures that it had presented to Congress, it was leaving it up to the legislators to decide which of the proposed bills to approve as long as measures were on stream by April.

Basilan Rep. Gerry Salapuddin, the deputy speaker for Mindanao, said the House was as determined to help ease the fiscal problem by sticking to its list of priority revenue measures.

"The P80-billion target is realistic. House members have been working doubly hard to pass the needed tax measures on time to ease the deficit problem and avert a further credit downgrade by international rating agencies," he said.

He noted that majority of the congressmen were present during the three-day special session called by President Macapagal-Arroyo last week to allow the Senate to act on pending revenue bills earlier approved by the House.

"We hope the Senate will complement the hard work shown by House members in passing urgent revenue measures to help ease the deficit problem," he said.

Lapus meanwhile rejected the charge by opposition representatives that his committee was railroading the passage of the VAT bill.

He said the committee records would disprove the charge that no public hearings were conducted on the proposed measure.

He said three public hearings were called last year to which seven consumers groups were invited and had participated in the discussions.

He said six hearings were also conducted on the proposed lifting of VAT exemptions.

Party-list Rep. Liza Maza yesterday resigned from the ways and means committee and accused Lapus of allegedly railroading the bill's passage.

In a letter to Speaker Jose de Venecia, Maza alleged that the approval was rushed "to comply with the directives of Malacañang." She also claimed that no public hearings were conducted.

She said legislators should have been given enough time to consult their constituencies on a bill that "will impose additional heavy burdens not only on businessmen and retailers but more on consumers, warrants a thorough discussion."

Lapus said he respected Maza's decision and noted that she would be depriving her party, Gabriela, of a voice in the committee.

Rep. Eric Singson (LP, Ilocos Sur), the principal author of the VAT bill, said he did not recall seeing Maza during the Jan. 6 and 7 hearings of the ways and means committee when consensus was reached on the bill, when "she could have registered her objections."

"There were several meetings and hearings made by the committee before a consensus was reached. There was no railroading to speak about," Singson said.

Muntinlupa Rep. Rozanno Rufino Biazon said Maza should not have resigned because the VAT measure was not the only piece of legislation affecting the masses.

HK maids lose fight vs pay cut

By Blanche Rivera

FOREIGN domestic helpers in Hong Kong lost their fight against lower wages after the Hong Kong Supreme Court ruled that the reduced minimum wage for foreign maids and the new taxes on their employers were lawful and reasonable.

The Philippine Overseas Labor Office in Hong Kong reported that the application for judicial review of the new wages and levy filed by four Filipino domestic helpers and an Indonesian was dismissed by the Hong Kong court.

The report, dated Jan. 4, was submitted to Labor Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas by labor attaché to Hong Kong Wilfreda Misterio.

"After marathon hearings on 6 to 10 September 2004, Hon. Justice Hartmann ruled that the levy imposed on employers at HK$400 per month with effect on Oct. 1, 2003 and the reduction of the minimum allowable wage of foreign domestic helpers from HK$3,670 to HK$3,270 per month with effect from 1 April 2004 are both reasonable and lawful," Misterio said in her report, citing salient points of the decision.

Misterio said that the applicants were "keen" to appeal the decision within the next 28 days. The Hong Kong court handed down the ruling on Jan. 4.

The decision would affect around 150,000 Filipino domestic helpers in Hong Kong, the biggest block of foreign house help working in the Chinese territory.

The Hong Kong court said that the petitioners, in the first place, did not have the legal standing to challenge the levy and lower wages because they were no citizens.

The court also stressed that the levy and lower wages were reasonable.

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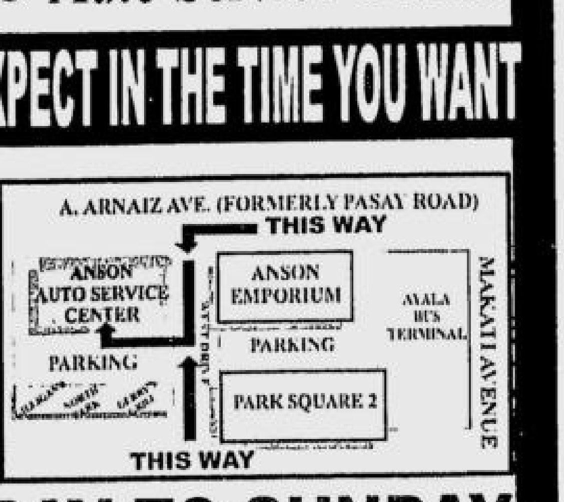

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WHO sends experts to RP to probe meningo cases

THE WORLD Health Organization is dispatching two experts to help the country's health officials contain an outbreak of a deadly meningitis-like disease, officials said yesterday.

Nineteen of 25 patients suspected of having meningococcemia have died since early 2004, the WHO's regional office in Manila said. Most of the cases were reported in Baguio City.

"This is an exceptionally high case fatality rate for meningococcal infection so we are treating the situation seriously," WHO country representative Dr. Jean-Marc Olive said.

"However, we need to know how many of these suspected cases are really due to meningococcal infection and not to other causes," he said.

Health authorities said only two of the 19 who died were confirmed as having the disease, whose symptoms include headache, vomiting, stiff neck, rashes and fever.

Olive said a meningococcemia expert is arriving in Manila late Wednesday from WHO headquarters in Geneva, while a lab specialist will arrive later this week in an attempt to contain the disease.

"By fully understanding the extent of the problem, additional appropriate control measures can be undertaken," he said.

However, Olive said there was a "very low risk of infection" for the public because the disease is spread only through very close contact or exposure for a long period of time.

Meningococcemia is endemic in the Philippines and many parts of Asia, but it rarely results in large outbreaks. The incubation period is usually two to 10 days. *AP*

Palace says Pinoys downed more beer last year

From page A1

hard-pressed to explain where Filipinos, including people belonging to low-income classes such as drivers and maids, were getting their money for cell phone pre-paid cards. "They probably get extra income," he said.

He said Smart Communication and Globe Telecoms must be making a killing from the shift in consumer preferences.

While President Macapagal-Arroyo monitors surveys from Social Weather Stations and Pulse Asia to get the pulse of the public, she also gets updates on surveys such as the consumer-oriented AC Nielsen report, according to Bunye.

He said he came out with the AC Nielsen findings on consumer demand to "even out" findings of other surveys that showed a downcast outlook on the economy and eroding public confidence in the Arroyo administration.

Boncodin bullish

With a budget deficit lower than expected last year, Budget Secretary Emilia Boncodin is also bullish about the prospects of the economy in 2005.

"In 2004, our national government deficit target was P197.8 billion. It looks like it would be under P190 billion," Boncodin said yesterday at a forum at Sitio Fernandina in San Juan.

"In fact last night, when we were looking at the numbers, it is anywhere between P185 and P187 billion," she said.

Boncodin said the warning last year that the country was headed toward financial ruin had "awaken us from our lull."

"Now that we are all in a problem-solving mode—the Executive, Congress and others—I'm very much optimistic that 2005 will really be a much better year," she declared.

Customs exceeds target

Boncodin based this assessment on two factors—the government agencies' ability to exceed revenue targets in 2004 (which she hopes will be repeated this year), and the expected additional revenues from new taxes in 2005.

She said it appeared that the government had exceeded its revenue target for 2004 by P15 to P20 billion. "And that is the reason why I was able to pay up our debts," she said.

Boncodin said the Bureau of Customs and other agencies like the Land Transportation Office, the Bureau of Treasury and the Department of Foreign Affairs had exceeded their revenue targets.

But not BIR

Only the Bureau of Internal Revenue was "slightly below target," she said. "Their (BIR's) target for last year was P477 billion. If they fall on their target by say P3 billion to P4 billion, that is really ... negligible," she said.

Yet Boncodin said these successes did not mean that the country had already survived the crisis. The country is, in fact, "still nursing" one.

Not yet out of the woods

Explaining Ms Arroyo's statement last year that the country was no longer in the middle of a fiscal crisis, Boncodin said: "What the President said is that we are out of the deepest woods of the crisis. But we are not (yet) out of the fiscal problem. Definitely not. We still have a huge deficit."

Salonga: GMA is impeachable for obstruction of justice

From page A1

bayan Magazine.

"There is a term for it in US and Philippine law—obstruction of justice—which is an impeachable offense," Salonga said.

Salonga said he was "gratified" that Estrada was recovering well.

"But in a deeper sense, we are distressed by the breakdown in our system of justice and the almost total absence of the rule of law, despite assertions to the contrary of our high officials from the judicial and executive departments of government," he said.

Revive rule of law

"What can the judiciary do now? Recoup and revive the rule of law, we insist, and no nonsense this time. When Erap gets back, resume the interrupted trial. No slow-motion system of justice. Make us proud of our own judicial system," Salonga also said.

Estrada, who faces four charges of plunder involving nearly P5 billion in government funds, including excise tax for Ilocos Sur, is expected to return home on Saturday *(Story on Page A1)*, after undergoing knee surgery operations at the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital and post-operation rehab at his rented flat in the luxurious residential hotel, Parkview, Hong Kong.

While in Hong Kong, Estrada was photographed being visited by his former Cabinet members at his hospital. He had also his barber flown to Hong Kong.

Salonga asserted that Estrada's knee surgery could have been done here, as also asserted in a petition to the Supreme Court by the Special Prosecution Panel headed by Ombudsman and Tanodbayan Simeon Marcelo and Special Prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio on Dec. 20, 2004.

He said even the Department of Foreign Affairs' consular office in Hong Kong should have checked the rules on the issuance of license for Dr. Christopher Mow, Estrada's personal physician who had reportedly insisted that the operation be done in Hong Kong.

SALONGA: Letting Estrada go to Hong Kong violates law.

OUSTED President Joseph Estrada jokes with his former Cabinet secretaries at the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital where he is recuperating from a knee-replacement surgery. The ex-President's men: From left, Ben Diokno, Alberto Romualdez, Jose Pardo, Gregorio Vigilar, Horacio Morales, Felipe Medalla and former Sen. Francisco Tatad. AP

"Was the entire government in a state of coma, beginning with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), the Sandiganbayan and even the alert prosecutor, in the Office of the Ombudsman? How about Malacañang?" Salonga asked.

"There is one difference between President GMA and Erap, the deposed leader. GMA will probably do anything to remain in power. But Erap will do almost everything to return to power," Salonga also noted.

He said that the "moves and counter-moves" of Estrada and the President—such as the "pray over and laying of hand" over GMA by the ex-advisers of Bro. Eddie Villanueva, and the subsequent visit of Erap's Cabinet members in the Hong Kong hospital—are quite obvious, despite their disclaimers in the media."

"In this political game, what they do is more important than what they say," he added.

Estrada first asked permission from court to travel for medical treatment on Nov. 10, 2001, but this was denied by the Special Division of the Sandiganbayan on June 5, 2002.

In December 2003, the Special Division of the Sandiganbayan granted Estrada's Urgent Motion for Permission to Travel to the United States for medical reasons.

Ms Macapagal's spokesperson even appeared on media saying that the government would help him secure a US visa.

But Estrada canceled his plans to help campaign for his bosom buddy Fernando Poe Jr. in his presidential bid last May.

In October 2004, Estrada renewed his request to travel to Hong Kong for medical treatment.

GMA: I've full trust and faith in Noli not to jump ship

From page A1

De Castro assuming the presidency should the Supreme Court decide against her, the President laughed heartily and said: "I have my full faith and trust in Noli de Castro. He could've run for president if he wanted to in 2004 and he would have handily won but he chose to be my running mate and to support my administration."

De Castro, who was present during the occasion, did not respond when one of the hosts jokingly asked him to declare if he would not take over during another people power. De Castro left before the President's open forum was finished.

The President said she relied on De Castro to do a host of administrative duties ranging from housing to price stabilization.

Anti-corruption czar

During the same forum, she also announced the appointment of her chief presidential legal counsel Merceditas Gutierrez as the country's new "anticorruption czar."

"It was hard to look for an anti-corruption czar," Ms Arroyo said at the gala MOPC night.

"It had to be somebody that had a lot of stature and it has to be somebody that has a very clean name. But after tossing names all around, we found one," Ms Arroyo said during the P1,000 per plate dinner attended by around 500 guests.

Ms Arroyo said Gutierrez, who was previously acting justice secretary, had served the Department of Justice for 30 years "without a taint of scandal."

She also said Gutierrez has the "stature to call anybody that she needs to call."

Patterned after ICAC

Ms Arroyo said Gutierrez would help her oversee the operations of the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission which she wants patterned after Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption.

The PAGC is headed by Constancia de Guzman, a former undersecretary at the Department of National Defense.

"We're adopting a lot of the methods, organizational setup, framework of the ICAC—investigation, prevention and education and we are doing that also in a comprehensive program and Tony Kwok is very much involved in this as a consultant," Ms Arroyo said.

Kwok, one of the founders of ICAC, last month held an anti-corruption workshop for Cabinet and sub-Cabinet officials in Malacañang where they came up with specific time-bound plans to rid graft and corruption.

Kwok's ICAC was credited for turning around Hong Kong's reputation from being one of the most corrupt to one of the cleanest economies in the world. Ms Arroyo said Kwok will return to Manila next month to check on the progress in the anti-corruption front.

No general amnesty

Ms Arroyo said Kwok has not recommended the grant of a general amnesty on corrupt officials as Hong Kong did in 1974.

"He hasn't suggested that we have to do that here but there are many things that we have to do and these are the things that Mercy (Gutierrez) is overseeing. The PAGC is in the Office of the President and Mercy is in the OP so she is helping me oversee their activities," she said.

Ms Arroyo said one of the important things to be done is to increase the number of graft investigators because the success of the prosecution depends not on lawyers but on the strength of the cases.

Can do it in 3 years

Ms Arroyo noted that it took Hong Kong seven years since the establishment of the ICAC to rid itself of corruption.

"But Tony Kwok says that with our political will, what he has seen us doing and because we have been learning from mistakes of other countries, he thinks in fact that we can do it in three years but we have to have the political will and I ask all of you to help me with that political will," Ms Arroyo said.

Erap says burning of ABS-CBN van a warning to 'biased' media

From page A1

TV crew to lie face down on the pavement, and lobbed a Molotov bomb into the P35-million van. No one was injured, but expensive broadcast equipment inside the van was destroyed.

'Group K'

The gunmen escaped, and a so-called "Group K" later claimed responsibility for the attack. In an e-mail sent to media organizations, the group claimed its members were supporters of Poe who died last month. It accused ABS-CBN of "suppressing the truth" in its coverage of the May 10 presidential election that Poe lost to President Macapagal-Arroyo.

"That is the lesson to the media who are one-sided or feeding disinformation to the public," Estrada told the Inquirer. "The people are angry about the media's disinformation."

Mouthing an oft repeated statement, he said: "You can fool the people once or twice, but you can't fool the people all of the time."

Estrada, however, doubted whether Poe's supporters were behind the burning of the ABS-CBN van. "It could have been cooked up by the police," he said.

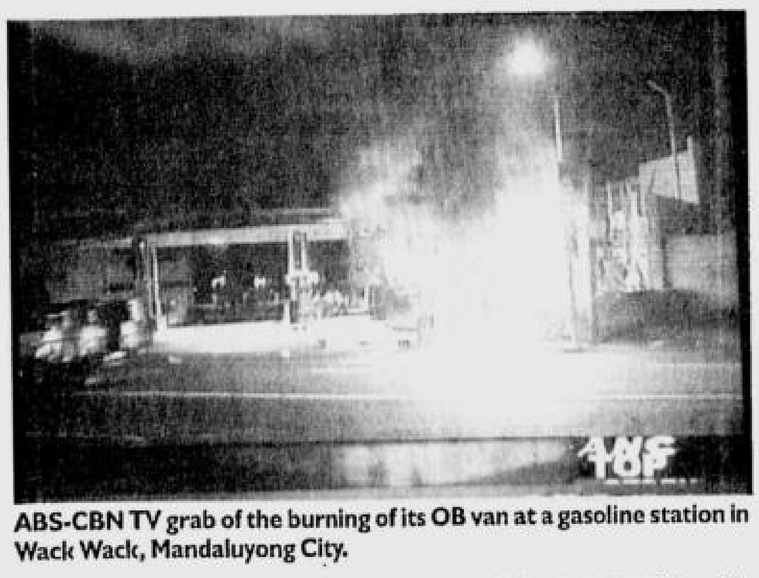
Estrada voiced his displeasure over media coverage during a Dec. 31 interview with the Inquirer in Hong Kong. He accused some local journalists of being paid hacks of the Palace.

"Some of you are worse than *kotong* (mulcting) cops. *Kotong* cops go away when you give them money, some of your colleagues come back for more again and again," he said.

Attack on press freedom

Malacañang condemned the burning of the ABS-CBN van as an attack on press freedom, even as it denied insinuations by some opposition figures that the Arroyo administration had a hand in the incident.

"Let's allow the authorities, the Philippine National Police, to conduct the appropriate investigation on this matter. Let them come up their findings," Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said in an interview over dzMM, the ABS-CBN network's AM radio station.



ABS-CBN TV grab of the burning of its OB van at a gasoline station in Wack Wack, Mandaluyong City.

"In the meantime, we condemn this as an attack against press freedom. We hope this incident will not be repeated," Bunye said.

NBI investigation

National Bureau of Investigation Director Reynaldo Wycoco said the NBI would also conduct a parallel investigation. "Our assistance has been sought by ABS-CBN," he said.

President Macapagal-Arroyo, in a speech at the Manila Overseas Press Club gala night held in Malacañang yesterday, was also expected to reiterate her vow to solve the killings of journalists.

She said nothing was "more corrosive to democracy than the murder of journalists in pursuit of truth."

"I stand before you tonight deeply committed to protecting the health, life and safety of every journalist who plies his or her trade in the pursuit of truth and justice. And I will not rest until those assassins are brought to justice. You deserve no less. The nation deserves no less," a draft of Ms Arroyo's speech said.

She asked for media's help in "gathering information to convict those assassins" as well as in spreading "the truth and the good news and get our people on board the express coach of economic reform."

NUJP statement

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines also condemned the burning of the ABS-CBN OB van.

"Although nobody was hurt in the incident, NUJP looks at it as a blatant attack on media," Jose Torres Jr., chair of the NUJP Commission for the Protection of Journalists, said in a statement.

Excuse for violence

"We continue to stand defiant against moves to silence the Philippine media through intimidation, attacks and killings," he added.

NUJP chair Inday Espina Varona rebutted the reported justification of the so-called "Group K" in its burning of the ABS-CBN van.

"NUJP condemns any line of reasoning that implies that displeasure over media reports—whether for real or imagined slights—is enough excuse for violence. This is unacceptable," Varona said in a separate statement.

Varona stressed that the NUJP supported ethical reportage, but "it will consistently fight any attempt to bend media by coercion."

The NUJP called on the ABS-CBN and the country's media practitioners not to be cowed by this attack.

"We urge them not to be intimidated by these saboteurs and political manipulators. We appeal to them to go on doing their jobs as professionally and responsibly as they can," Varona said. ***With reports by Juliet Labog-Javellana, and Leila B. Salaverria in Manila, and Delfin T. Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau***

Estrada coming home Saturday

From page A1

overnight on Jan. 9 at his rented 2,700-square-foot flat at the Parkview in Hong Kong, after hosting dinner there for his family and his former Cabinet members and their wives.

The European-style Parkview is a hotel-residential complex similar to the Oakwood service apartments in Makati City.

Estrada's rented flat is said to be one of the biggest in the luxury resort located inside the Tai Tam Country Park on 88 Tai Tam Reservoir Road.

The monthly rent for Parkview flats measuring from 770 to 2,067 square feet ranges from HK$30,000 to HK$101,000.

'Small matter'

Senator Estrada, the ousted President's eldest son, said his father's overnight stay at the Parkview was a "small matter" and had to do with an effort to cut down on hospital expenses.

"It's cheaper for us to stay in an apartment. *Mas mura* but I don't 'know how much [in comparison to] the expenses if we will stay in the hospital until Jan. 15," he said in a press conference at the Senate.

Jinggoy described the 2,700-square-foot flat at the Parkview—which he said was five minutes away from the hospital by taxi—as a "simple apartment."

He said that at one point, the members of the family, including himself, had to stay at the Parkview because occupying rooms in the hospital was too expensive.

He said a room at the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital cost more than HK$2,000, not to mention the expenses incurred on his father's police escorts.

Jinggoy said the high cost of the family's continued stay in Hong Kong was the reason for the decision to return to Manila, and not the "unfounded" claim of another plot to overthrow the Arroyo administration.

"No, we have no plans of destabilizing this government. And we will never destabilize it because it is already destabilized," he said.

Polk Street

Jinggoy said that upon his return, the deposed President would want to stay at his own residence on Polk Street in San Juan, which is near hospitals with the necessary equipment for post-operation therapy.

He said that based on his experience, therapy was imperative to prevent knees from stiffening.

"I have been operated in the knee also. And I had eight months of therapy," he said.

Should the Sandiganbayan refuse this request, Jinggoy said, the ex-President should have "continuous therapy" and stay in any one of these facilities: Cardinal Santos Medical Center, Makati Medical Center, or Asian Hospital.

He said the Veterans Memorial Medical Center was not an option because although "the doctors are qualified, sad to say, the facilities and equipment needed for the therapy of my father are not there."

The young Estrada refused to say how much his family had so far spent for the trip and the operation.

"Tomorrow, I will know," he said.

Estrada ordered the withdrawal of the motion seeking an extension of his stay through a phone call to lawyer Jay Flaminiano, as the defense and prosecution panels were trading barbs on the issue.

Trading barbs

Defense lawyers were citing a letter from Estrada's American doctor, Christopher Mow, who had warned that there could be complications in the patient's recovery should he be moved from Hong Kong this early.

But brandishing yesterday's copy of the INQUIRER, Villa-Ignacio said Estrada's hosting a dinner for his ex-Cabinet members only showed that he was recovering very well.

HE'S NOT taking criticisms of his Hong Kong interlude lying down. Joseph Estrada is fighting right back saying that he is returning to lead a "united opposition." Here he is being interviewed by the Associated Press on Jan. 7 at the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital.

AP

"They have not presented any proof of the relief being sought. [Estrada's] operation has been successful. He has been discharged. Saguisag could hardly pass as a qualified physician. I don't think he has earned units in medicine," Villa-Ignacio said of the defense lead counsel.

The hearing to deliberate on Estrada's motion to seek an extension of his stay in Hong Kong was called by Presiding Justice Teresita Leonardo de Castro, acting chair of the special division, which has Associate Justices Francisco Villaruz and Diosdado Peralta as members.

Peralta stood in for Senior Justice Edilberto Sandoval, who was reportedly lying sick at the Sandiganbayan clinic when the hearing started.

Sandoval had earlier quit his post in the special division, but the Supreme Court rejected his resignation.

Villa-Ignacio said Estrada's forays outside the hospital proved that defense lawyers had been submitting "inaccurate representation" that had been given credence by the antigraft court.

Proving Chavit wrong

He noted that Estrada's doctors had earlier said that the knee-replacement operation was "life-threatening," and that the patient would take long to recover.

"Unfortunately for the Sandiganbayan, it believes them all," he said.

Asked about Estrada's true reason for withdrawing the motion, Saguisag said the ex-President only wanted to prove his critics—including Villa-Ignacio and Ilocos Sur Gov. Luis "Chavit" Singson—wrong.

"What's important is that in four days, Villa-Ignacio and Singson will be proven as false prophets of doom. They were the only ones who were saying he would escape," Saguisag said, adding that the two should resign "out of *delicadeza*."

Interviewed after the hearing, Saguisag stood by his argument that Estrada should have been allowed to stay because it was "very difficult to second-guess" a medical judgment.

"Let's just hope and pray that there will be no complications because if there is one, we will see what will be the prescription of Dr. Dennis Villa-Ignacio," he said.

Reached for comment, Singson said Estrada was returning only because the public had been warned about his plans to flee to China.

"He would have fled to China by now had we not seen through his plans," Singson said.

At the House, administration lawmakers deplored Estrada's perceived abuse of the temporary respite extended by the Sandiganbayan.

Bad precedent

Majority Leader Prospero Nograles said Estrada's penchant for high living was the reason for his neglect of his commitment to the court.

He said Estrada had clearly defied the court's order for him to stay at the hospital, and pointed out that such an action constituted disrespect of the court.

"His defiance of the court sets a bad precedent to others similarly situated and detained," Nograles said.

Davao Oriental Rep. Mayo Almario lamented that Estrada had been seeking special privileges from the court but was not responsible enough to observe its conditions.

"I find it highly ironic that there was initial speculation Mr. Estrada was putting together a shadow Cabinet. It seems from his actions that he was flying the gang in for a frat party instead," Almario said.

GMA's compromise

Almario also asked the court to verify reports that the deposed President had in fact stayed at the Parkview since his arrival in Hong Kong on Dec. 27 until Dec. 31, when the knee surgery was performed.

But Anakpawis Rep. Crispin Beltran said that Estrada's behavior was expected of him, and that Ms Arroyo had no one to blame but herself for it.

"Because of her deep fear and insecurity over the outpouring of grief over the loss of Estrada's best friend and former presidential candidate Fernando Poe Jr., President Arroyo gave the thumbs-up to Estrada's trip to Hong Kong and waylaid all other political and juridical concerns and considerations," Beltran said, adding:

"Estrada has clearly gotten the upper hand of the government and he knows it. He has managed to keep a strong and moneyed support base precisely because the Arroyo administration has entered into unprincipled compromises with him and his allies."

The whole arm

Ruth Cervantes-Casiño, one of the convenors of PlunderWatch, told the INQUIRER that with the leeway Estrada had been getting from the Sandiganbayan, it seemed that nothing could stop him from violating the limits it had set.

"If you give [Estrada] a hand, he'd want to get the whole arm," Casiño said in a phone interview.

She said that Estrada should not have been allowed to leave the country in the first place, and that there were many prisoners who also needed urgent medical attention.

Non-bailable

"What is he accused of? Isn't he accused of [plunder], a nonbailable offense?" Casiño said.

PlunderWatch is one of the private complainants in the impeachment case filed against Estrada in 2000.

The impeachment eventually led to Edsa II, the fourth anniversary of which will be marked on Jan. 20.

With reports from Cynthia D. Balana and Norman Bordadora

Palace indulgent toward Erap . . .

From page A1

so let's just let that pass," Norberto Gonzales, chief of staff of President Macapagal-Arroyo, said yesterday in a phone interview.

Gonzales added: "What is serious is if he will not come back, but he's coming back on Saturday."

It was Gonzales who had coordinated the arrangements for Estrada's trip to Hong Kong, his first overseas since he was forced to step down from office in 2001 on charges of massive corruption.

Assurance

Gonzales said he had received assurance from Estrada's camp that the deposed President would return as scheduled on Jan. 15 and head straight to his vacation house in Tanay, Rizal, where the Sandiganbayan had allowed him to stay while undergoing trial for plunder and perjury.

Both Gonzales and Silvestre Afable III, Ms Arroyo's communications director, also brushed off rumors of a mobilization by forces aligned with Estrada.

The ousted President himself fueled the speculation on his departure for Hong Kong late last year, when he criticized Ms Arroyo and said he would surely come back to lead a revolution against what he called "the reign of corruption and mismanagement."

Further fanning the speculation were reports and photographs of the visit of his former Cabinet officials in his room at the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital, and the supposed meeting of members of the opposition faction "United Opposition" on Tuesday night.

But Afable ruled out the occurrence of an uprising against Ms Arroyo, saying present conditions were not ripe for it.

Taking Estrada's word

"Moreover, President Estrada himself has been saying that he has no intentions to get involved in destabilization, and that what he only wants is to form a united opposition," Afable said, adding:

"We take his word that he's not going to engage in any destabilization, and I don't believe he will be so engaged.

GONZALES: Defender of the faith.

"We think he has a plan to unite the opposition as he says, and we welcome this plan and we think that's good for our democracy."

Gonzales said Malacañang was not worried by the reported meetings of the opposition, "as long as they do not engage in destabilization."

"If all they want to do is have a united opposition, that is within our democratic system and we welcome that," Gonzales said.

Not spent force

Afable, however, conceded that Estrada was not yet a spent force.

"Not really," he said in response to a question. "President Estrada still has a lot of followers. Objectively [speaking], there is a constituency that believes in him."

Erap barber flew business class to HK

From page A1

President said.

Besides, he said, Philippine Airlines was offering a "buy one, take one" promo, and he took the chance of getting his barber to fly with a member of his staff, lawyer Rolando Ramirez.

The INQUIRER checked out the supposed PAL promo and learned that the special fares from Manila to Hong Kong, Honolulu, Las Vegas, San Francisco or Los Angeles, and Singapore applied to first class and Mabuhay (business) class.

For the Manila-Hong Kong promo, a round-trip Mabuhay class ticket costs US$788 (or P44,128). An economy ticket goes for $454 (or P25,459).

Barber not spared

Estrada expressed disappointment and dismay about why the INQUIRER seemed bent on criticizing him and blaming him for everything.

"There is a big problem in the economy ... corruption in high places, and yet you focus your attention on me. You put me on your banner headline and you did not even spare my barber," he said, adding:

"Ako parati ang pinupuntirya (I'm always being targeted)."*Armand N. Nocum*

Cops reporting on HK whoopee to be probed

From page A1

right for the escorts to allow their charge to leave the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital where he is recovering from knee surgery, stay overnight elsewhere, or even host a dinner for his former Cabinet officials who had flown in for a visit.

After that, we will ask the Sandiganbayan what punishment we can slap against the escorts," Aglipay later told the INQUIRER. "If the authority is given to us, we will investigate and see what punishment we can give within our authority."

No way

It apparently did not matter to Aglipay that it was the police escorts themselves who had called his attention to Estrada's purported violation of the Sandiganbayan resolution governing his stay in Hong Kong.

Having been given strict orders by the court, the escorts should not have allowed Estrada to wander out of the hospital, Aglipay said, adding:

"When the court says 'No way,' it means no way," he said.

Aglipay also said Nicolas and company could not make excuses like "vulnerability" to the ousted President's vaunted influence.

"They're no rookie policemen. They have with them a police colonel, so they should have known what to do," he said.

The coolest family destinations are just folds away.
LIFESTYLE

The WORLD

Editor **Luverne B. Gueco**

Nationwide polls in Iraq impossible—Allawi

TIKRIT, Iraq—Prime Minister Iyad Allawi admitted Tuesday that some parts of Iraq would not be able to take part in elections in three weeks' time as deadly strikes killed at least 20 people, six of them in a car bombing in Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit.

"There are some pockets that will not participate in the election but they are not large," Allawi told reporters.

The US-backed premier vowed to spend $2.2 billion this year to bolster the security forces now fighting a bloody insurgency in central Iraq that has cost thousands of lives.

"When our forces are capable of taking over the war against the insurgents, we will be able to begin discussions with the multinational forces on the Iraq army taking over the lead role in maintaining security in Iraqi towns," he said.

The insurgency has been fanned by widespread concerns among the Sunni Arab elite, which dominated Saddam's regime and all previous Iraqi governments, that the new parliament will be dominated by the long oppressed Shiite majority.

Allawi said the insurgency had cost Iraq more than $10 billion in sabotage against oil and power infrastructure alone.

In the latest assaults on Iraq's oil distribution network, two pipelines near the northern oil center of Kirkuk were set ablaze, officials said.

As the clock ticked down to polling day on Jan. 30, sectarian tensions entered the campaign with the prime minister's Iraqi National Accord party crying foul over the alleged use of religion by Shiite politicians.

The INA lodged a formal complaint against the Shiite joint list, the Unified Iraqi Alliance (UIA), for violating state law by using religion in its advertising.

The party also accused Shiite militias of intimidating voters ahead of the poll.

Tuesday's bombing in Tikrit targeted a police station and came a day after Baghdad's deputy police chief was assassinated.

All of the casualties were police, the US military said.

Militants loyal to Iraq's most wanted man, al-Qaida operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, said they carried out the bombing, in an Internet statement.

In the Sunni belt immediately south of the capital, dubbed the triangle of death because of the frequency of rebel attacks, three Iraqi civilians were killed and three wounded in a roadside bombing near Yussufiyah, witnesses and a hospital source said.

The bombing apparently targeted a US military convoy but the casualties were on a passing minibus.

North of Baghdad, five Iraqi soldiers and a civilian were killed in two separate attacks in the city of Samarra, recaptured from insurgents in a US-led assault in October, police said.

An Iraqi translator for the Americans was shot dead near the main northern city of Mosul, while two police officers were killed by gunmen in the capital, police said.

Further west, two Iraqi civilians were killed by mortar fire near the notorious US-run Abu Ghraib prison, the military said. *AFP*

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New anti-AIDS campaign uses cartoon condoms

UNITED NATIONS—A new global campaign to stop the spread of AIDS uses three animated characters dressed as condoms to deliver a serious message in humorous public service spots in 41 languages: If you're going to have sex, use a condom.

The short spots are being offered free to broadcasters, community groups and universities and have the potential of reaching 80 percent of the world's population, Canadian producer-director Firdaus Kharas said Tuesday.

"We're using humor to stop the spread of AIDS," he told a news conference launching the public service announcements which are targeted at young people aged 15 to 24 in places threatened by the epidemic, including India, China, Russia, the Caribbean and central Asia.

"The Three Amigos"—as the cartoon condoms named Shaft, Stretch and Dick are called—are pictured in a variety of settings from a spaceship to a soccer field to a casino. Twenty different spots are available in each of the 41 languages and they vary in length from 20 to 60 seconds, with some quite blatantly sexual and others much more restrained to appeal to different audiences.

The punch line in the spaceship spot says: "No condom, No blastoff. Stop the spread of AIDS." The soccer spot says: "You just can't score without a condom." And the spot focusing on a roulette wheel in a casino says: "Not all gamblers realize the odds stacked against them. Don't gamble with your life. Use a condom. Stop the spread of AIDS."

Kharas said the idea for the spots came from his co-producer, South African film writer Brent Quint, who believes as he does that AIDS is "a preventable disease," and that using animated figures and humor can get the message across that condoms are essential for safe sex. *AP*

Nasa to explore innards of comet

CAPE CANAVERAL—For the first time ever, Nasa is setting off on a collision course with a comet, in hopes of blasting a huge hole in the celestial snowball and gazing upon the original ingredients of the solar system preserved inside.

It all begins with a planned Wednesday launch of Deep Impact, a copper-fortified, comet-busting spacecraft.

Nasa has a single second—at precisely eight seconds past 1:47 p.m.—to send Deep Impact on a 431-million-km, six-month voyage to Comet Tempel 1. Good weather is forecast, cheering scientists who are up against a firm two-week deadline for launching the probe.

Scientists have no idea what Comet Tempel 1 looks like. They don't know whether the spacecraft will have to punch through a crust as hard as a concrete sidewalk or as flimsy as corn flakes.

All they know with certainty is that the nucleus, or core, of the comet is three times as long as it is wide, and that they must crash into the sunlit side to capture pictures of the resulting crater and all the ice, dust and other primordial matter shooting out of the hole July 4.

Uncertainty over the comet's shape "has caused us some concern about, can we hit the comet," said Jay Melosh, a planetary geologist at the University of Arizona. Officially, Nasa puts the odds of a bull's-eye at better than 99 percent.

"We hope we'll make a crater... perhaps 300 feet in diameter, 100 feet deep, that we'll get through that crust and reveal the interior of the comet," Melosh said Tuesday. "But we don't know what comets are made of. We don't know how strong they are."

This $330-million mission should provide those answers, along with clues to the origin of the solar system 4 1/2 billion years ago.

Because of the relative speed at the moment of impact—37,000 kph—no explosives are needed for the job. The force of the smashup will be the equivalent of 4 1/2 tons of TNT going off. *AP*

Asian quake, tsunami death toll nears 159,000

JAKARTA—The death toll from last month's earthquake and tsunamis that devastated Indian Ocean coastlines rose to 158,860 Wednesday as Indonesia added another 1,261 to its list of fatalities.

Indonesia, hardest-hit by the Dec. 26 walls of water, has now reported 106,523 deaths, with 12,047 people missing, an increase of more than 2,000 from Tuesday, the social affairs ministry said.

Aid workers on the ground say many more bodies are yet to be collected.

In Sri Lanka, the toll stands at 30,725 confirmed dead, the government said. The number of people reported missing jumped from 4,939 to 5,903, latest government figures showed.

In neighboring India, the official toll stood 10,151 with 5,628 still missing and feared dead.

The death toll in Thailand Wednesday rose by four to 5,313, but the number of missing continued to slip, down 25 to 3,345, including 1,078 foreigners and 2,267 Thais.

Burma's (Myanmar) Prime Minister Soe Win said Thursday 59 people were killed in the tsunamis and more than 3,200 left homeless. This was down from the UN's estimated 90.

At least 82 people were killed and another 26 were missing in the Maldives, a government spokesperson said.

Sixty-eight people were dead in Malaysia, most of them in Penang, according to police, while in Bangladesh a father and child were killed after a tourist boat capsized in large waves, officials said.

Fatalities also occurred on the east coast of Africa where 298 people were declared dead in Somalia, 10 in Tanzania and one in Kenya.

The US Geological Survey said the earthquake west of the Indonesian island of Sumatra measured 9.0 on the Richter scale—making it the largest quake worldwide in four decades.

The number of foreigners confirmed by their countries of origin as having died in the tsunamis stood at 408 Tuesday, but thousands of others were reported as missing, believed dead, and many more were unaccounted for.

The confirmed death toll was expected to rise as new identifications were completed and missing persons were declared dead.

In Thailand, where the biggest numbers of foreign tourists were holidaying, the interior ministry said that there were 1,102 foreigners among the 3,370, people still reporting missing. *AFP*

Death tolls by country:

Indonesia	106,523
Sri Lanka	30,882
India	10,151
Thailand	5,291
Somalia	298
Burma	90
Maldives	82
Malaysia	68
Tanzania	10
Bangladesh	2
Kenya	1

'Cosmological ruler' helps measure the universe

SAN DIEGO—By looking at a vast swath of sky, astronomers said on Tuesday they have figured out a way to measure the universe—using a kind of "cosmological ruler."

They found that the universe is flat, with ripples that began as the tiniest variations in radiation left over from the Big Bang, which many cosmologists believe gave birth to the universe.

As it cooled after the mega-explosion some 13.7 billion years ago, the infant universe was actually making a sound and those waves produced the ripples, said Daniel Eisenstein, an astronomer at the University of Arizona.

The way galaxies are scattered across the sky now corresponds to the sound waves in the early times of the cosmos, Eisenstein told reporters at a meeting of the American Astronomical Society.

"We regard this as smoking-gun evidence that gravity has played the major role in growing from the initial seeds in the microwave background (left over from the Big Bang) into the galaxies and clusters of galaxies that we see around us," he said.

"The most exciting thing from my point of view is the signature of these wiggles in the galaxy distribution... may be very useful as a cosmological ruler," said Richard Ellis of Caltech Optical Observatories. *Reuters*

Frenchwoman bids to row solo across Pacific

CALLAO, Peru—Frenchwoman Maud Fontenoy, the first woman to row the Atlantic from west to east, embarks on Wednesday on her latest "fabulous adventure": to row solo 8,000 km across the Pacific from Peru to Tahiti.

Fontenoy, 27, will follow the route taken by Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl's epic 1947 Kon-Tiki expedition on a flimsy balsa raft that tried to prove the South Sea Islands could have been settled by an ancient race from thousands of miles to the east.

Frenchwoman Raphaela le Gouvello windsurfed the same route in 2003 but Fontenoy says no one has ever successfully rowed it.

Fontenoy will be completely alone in the sea without any support boats trailing her on the epic trip.

"It's all about a little woman on a little boat. I want to make this adventure really accessible by trying to make it as simple as possible," Fontenoy said at the rowing club in Lima's port, Callao, from where she will set off.

"Everyone knows how to row, there isn't a lot of money involved, it's just a simple story everyone can understand."

Fontenoy will push off in her scarlet boat Oceor—which looks like a cross between a racing car and a rocket, only with a sliding seat and oars in the middle—at around 4 p.m. on Wednesday as the summer heat begins to drop.

She expects the journey to take five months. "I know it's going to be a fabulous adventure."

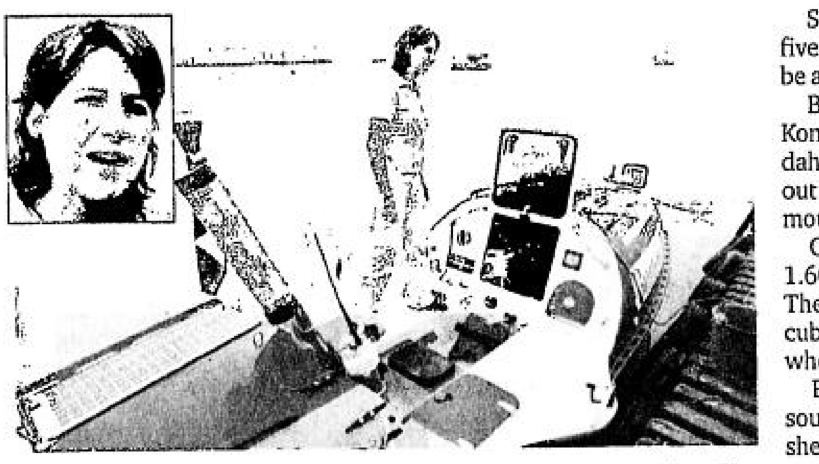
By coincidence, a replica of the Kon-Tiki raft will recreate Heyerdahl's expedition this year, setting out from Callao in April to study mounting threats to the oceans.

One end of Fontenoy's 7-by-1.60-meter craft is a tiny store. The other—measuring about one cubic meter—will be her home when she is not rowing.

Because of the heat in the southern hemisphere summer, she expects to row in the evening and at night.

Just big enough for a sleeping bag, a kettle, key navigation gear and a satellite phone, Fontenoy will spend her days in its insulated interior, with three books for company.

She has no Internet but a log of her journey will be posted on her website "www.maudfontenoy.com." *Reuters*



FRANCE'S Maud Fontenoy stands on her boat in Lima's Port Callao. She will row solo across the Pacific from Peru to Tahiti on Jan. 12. REUTERS

WORLDBRIEFS

Sharon congratulates Abbas

JERUSALEM—Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon phoned Mahmoud Abbas on Tuesday to congratulate him on his election as Palestinian president and offer cooperation, the highest-level contact between the sides in nearly four years. Abbas' predecessor Yasser Arafat last spoke to Sharon by telephone in February 2001 to congratulate him on his election victory. With a Palestinian uprising raging, Sharon subsequently boycotted Arafat, calling him an "archterrorist." Sharon's office said he spoke with Abbas for 10 minutes and welcomed his landslide election victory on a platform of non-violence. "He wished him success and the two agreed they would talk again soon," it said in a statement. A senior government official quote Sharon as telling Abbas: "I am offering you our cooperation." He said Sharon and Abbas spoke about a meeting in general terms but no date was set. In Washington, a US official said it was "positive and encouraging" that both sides were talking to each other. *Reuters*

New Canada mad cow case

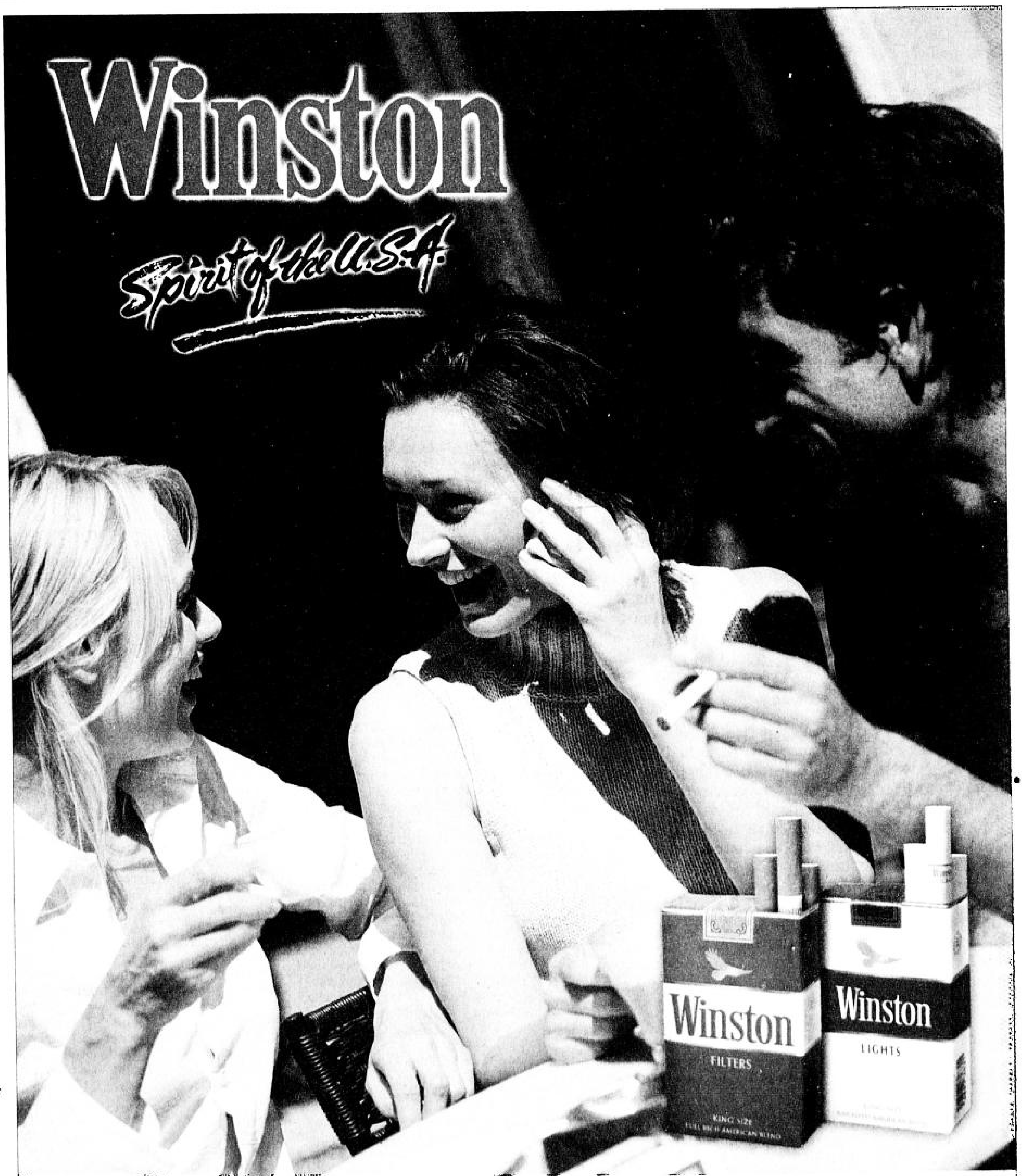
OTTAWA—Canada said Tuesday it had detected a third case of mad cow disease, and for the first time the infected beef cow was born after a ban on ruminant feed introduced in 1997 to check the spread of the disease. The discovery came as the United States, the prime market for Canada's farmers, was on the verge of lifting restrictions on certain Canadian cattle and beef imports, imposed after a first case of mad cow disease here in 2003. Washington said it would send a team of experts to assess the latest discovery even as Canadian officials downplayed the case. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency said no part of the 7-year-old animal from the western province of Alberta, infected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy, or "mad cow" disease, had entered the human food chain. But the discovery, just 10 days after officials confirmed the previous case of the disease, was another hammer blow for the Canadian beef industry which lost billions of dollars over the scare last year. *AFP*

New homeland security chief

WASHINGTON—US President George W. Bush on Tuesday nominated federal judge Michael Chertoff, a former prosecutor and architect of the antiterror USA Patriot Act after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, to become secretary of homeland security. After the debacle involving the nomination of former New York police commissioner Bernard Kerik, who abruptly withdrew from consideration a month ago in the face of some uncomfortable personal revelations, Chertoff, a US appeals court judge in Philadelphia, appeared to be a safe choice. Bush pointed out Chertoff, 51, has already been confirmed by the Senate three times for previous jobs. Reaction to the nomination from Capitol Hill was cautiously optimistic. Chertoff's confirmation would bring a veteran of the US legal response to the Sept. 11 attacks to head the 180,000-employee department charged with guarding the country against a repeat. "In the days after Sept. 11, Mike helped trace the terrorist attacks to the al-Qaida network. He understood immediately that the strategy in the war on terror is to prevent attacks before they occur," Bush said. *Reuters*

Search for WMD in Iraq ends

WASHINGTON—The search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq ended last month, nearly two years after President George W. Bush sent troops to disarm Saddam Hussein, The Washington Post reported on Wednesday. Officials who served with the group charged with hunting banned weapons said the violence in Iraq, coupled with a lack of new information, led them to fold up the effort shortly before Christmas, the newspaper reported. Charles Duelfer, the CIA special adviser who led the hunt, has returned home, and analysts serving in his Iraq Survey Group (ISG) have returned to CIA headquarters in Virginia, the report said, citing unnamed intelligence officials. The Post said the findings of an interim report that Duelfer submitted to Congress in September will stand as the ISG's final conclusions, according to a senior intelligence official. *Reuters*



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OPINION

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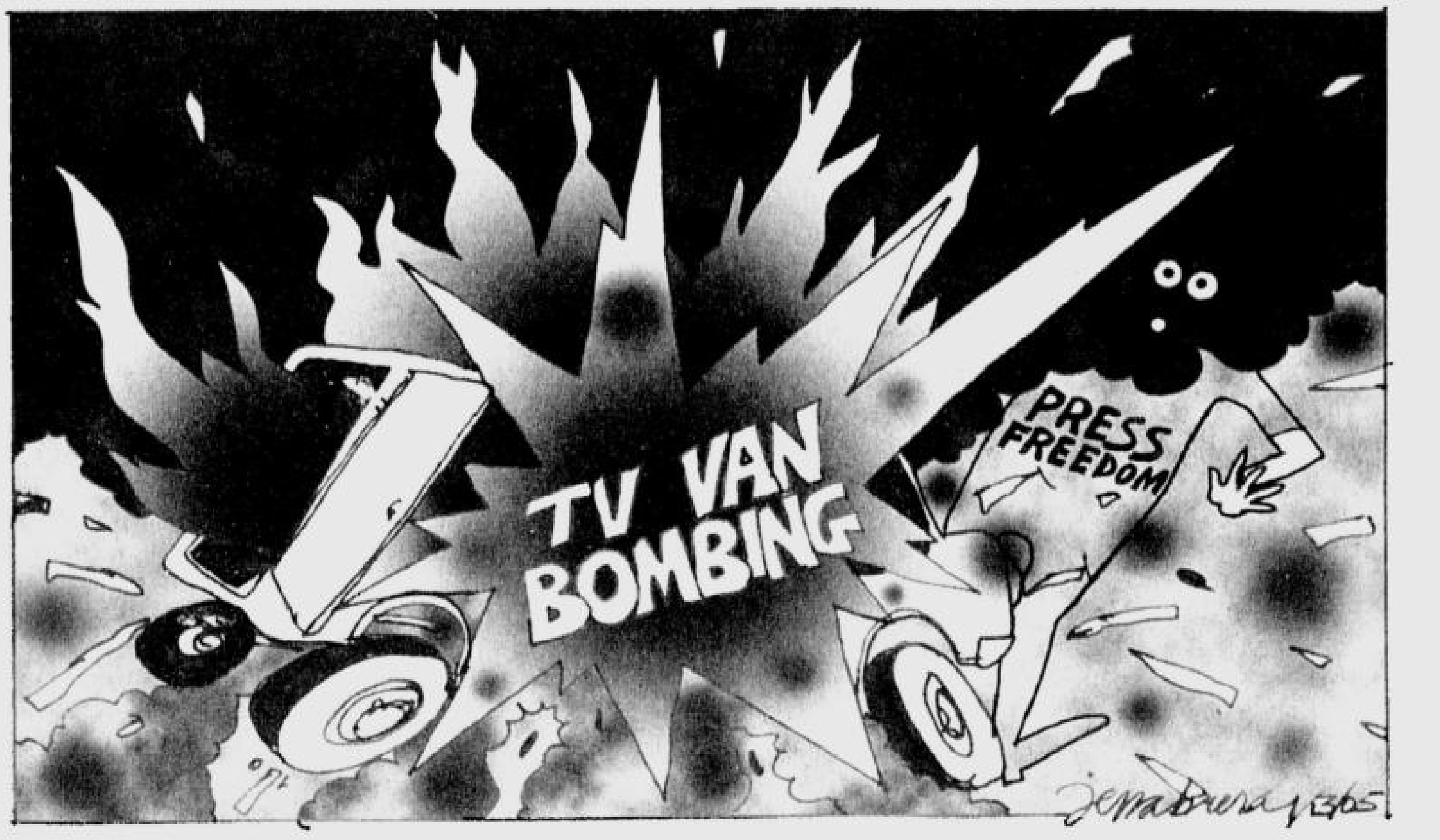


Joking?

EDITORIAL

IF it were a song, the "accomplishment report" Vice President Noli de Castro handed out to the media last Sunday would have sounded offbeat and out-of-tune. He trumpeted particularly his achievements as chair of the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council, as presidential adviser for OFW (overseas Filipino workers) concerns and as price control czar.

At his direction, he said, the operations of the government's key shelter agencies (KSAs)—the Home Development Mutual Fund or Pag-IBIG Fund, Home Guaranty Corp., National Housing Authority, National Home Mortgage Finance Corp., and the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board—were streamlined and simplified, their collection efficiency improved and their systems of delivering service made more responsive. On top of these, he said, he directed the efficient disposal of the KSAs' nonperforming assets to make them more viable and self-reliant.

We must give it to the Vice President that he understands what the KSAs must do to live up to their mandates. But **directing** them to do what they ought to do is definitely not our idea of accomplishment. We still have to know how much better the KSAs are performing now because of the Vice President's orders. It would have certainly cheered the public to hear about and, better still, see the concrete, positive outcomes of those orders.

De Castro cited the P3.5 billion in Pag-IBIG funds loaned to housing developers. Even as we have yet to see how effective the loans have been in addressing the country's housing needs, we cannot help but recall the P353-million Pag-IBIG loan extended to the real estate firm of Mike Velarde, the leader of the Catholic charismatic group El Shaddai, who supported De Castro and the President's candidacies in last year's elections. The single biggest drawdown in the history of the Pag-IBIG Fund looked no different from a political payback. Meanwhile, the HUDCC that he chairs projects that 3 million new houses would have to be built in the next five years to completely eliminate the housing backlog.

As Palace adviser on OFW concerns, De Castro boasted of his trip to Libya where he got a commitment from the Libyan government to hire more Filipinos and resume the RP-Libya Joint Committee Meeting and the RP-Libya "oil talks." Of course, we would like to see that this accomplishment will not remain in the realm of all-talk-no-action. And we will certainly be happy if something comes out of this deal with Libya.

De Castro also said he had submitted to the President his recommendations on what to do with the 80,000 or so Filipino overseas performing artists (OPAs) in Japan, who are now facing sudden unemployment because of a new Japanese law. At this point, it should be clear to the public who's to blame if nothing is done about the OPAs' problem. And we are at least assured that we don't have just a "spare tire" waiting in the wings.

The most astonishing by far among the Vice President's many wonderful accomplishments in his six months of holding public office was "keep(ing) the supply and prices of basic commodities stable last Christmas." For sure, there were still loads of Christmas goodies in the grocery stores way past New Year's Day. But this was not because some high public official was able to keep the supply lines working. This was more because higher prices had weakened Juan de la Cruz's buying power. Either the Vice President hasn't been to a market for a long time, or he was there just one time last Christmas so that he didn't have any way of making meaningful price comparisons.

As far as we can recall, this is the first time a vice president felt the need to submit his own accomplishment report to the Filipino people. It's not that it is totally wrong; some Filipinos would certainly appreciate knowing that public money is not being wasted on maintaining the Office of the Vice President. But it does seem strange, if not inappropriate, for an administration Vice President to make public his own accomplishments. After all, isn't his accomplishments also the accomplishments of the President and her entire administration, and therefore fit for inclusion in the President's Ulat sa Bayan? Now, if he were an **opposition** vice president, a separate report might have been more understandable.

But then, going by the contents of his accomplishment report, the Vice President could have been joking.

Cellar status

VIEWPOINT

Juan L. Mercado

YOU should see the e-mail flak. Hackles are up because the latest International Mathematics and Science Tests reveal Filipino students huddled, yet again, among the tail-enders. Jammed between Morocco and Botswana, our kids limped in putting our country at No. 41 among 45 countries in Math. In Science, we trailed behind Lebanon but was ahead of Botswana at No. 42.

Asians were again topnotchers. Singaporeans led, followed by kids from Korea, Hong Kong, Taipei and Japan. Indonesia was ahead of us in slot 36.

So, when do we scramble out of this cellar? We've been stuck in this boiler room since the release in 1966 of the first (TIMSS) results. Then educators "were shocked because among 41 countries, the Philippines ranked second in Math and third in Science"—but from the bottom, noted the United Nations Philippine Human Development Report.

When the second TIMSS results came out three years later, we still hadn't budged from the bodega. At 37th place, we were second to the last.

The decay started 65 years back, when we clipped seventh grade. Obviously, the rot can't be reversed overnight.

Our kids get 10 years of basic schooling, much of it of sub-standard quality. Other nations provide 13, sometimes 14, years. Even poorer Asean countries like Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia support 11 years.

Good schools do not come cheap. Singapore spent $1,582 per school kid when the first TIMSS were held. We allocated $138.

"So where did this *'Wow ang galing ng Pinoy'* blabber come from?" e-mailed a California writer to Pepeton J'Anton's website, "Pusong Pinoy." "Let's get real because without education, we can't make headway, given international competition. *Galing ng Pinoy?* Can you shine shoes?"

That fuming is understandable. Schools that don't educate infuriate Filipinos abroad. On becoming a Canadian, grandmother Rosario Fuentes e-mailed how she still helps relatives study to break free from the penury she knew in Masbate. "*Buhay namin ipre-prenda, sa educacion san anak ninda* (We pawn our lives for schooling of our children)."

"Those statistics are about as grim as they can be," Dr. Remigio Lacsamana in Florida writes. "Our teachers in Pampanga and Tarlac public schools were well qualified, particularly in English, Mathematics and Sciences. So what went wrong?"

Teachers are one factor. It's a pity President Macapagal-Arroyo's agenda does not find improving education as one of the top priorities. In America, there's a constant push to upgrade educational standards. We must reverse our downward spiral. The country's future hinges on education.

Today's 600,000-plus teachers make teaching the country's largest professional occupation. Teacher training and stripping away nonteaching job require priority.

"We moved to Canada right after I finished 3rd year high, so I experienced the differences," Cesar T from Toronto writes. "In the Philippines, we memorized answers and were spoon-fed. Here, you earn the mark you get.....If students will become laborers, does it matter what mark they got? Why is the passing mark 75 percent when in reality it's only 50 percent? So whose fault was it that we did so poorly in the high school readiness test? Issue *ba ito?*"

Yes, it's an issue. Last May, 700,000 of 1.4 million kids who got elementary school diplomas flunked the High School Readiness Tests. In Cebu City, all 67 elementary schools failed.

"This means majority of those enrolling in first year of public high schools know only 27 percent of what they were to have learned in elementary school," the respected Council of Private Educational Associations (Copea) pointed out.

Mentors did as poorly. In a qualifying exam for school principals, "teachers made the cutoff point only after education officials lowered the passing rate of the 200-item test from 150 to 100."

Onli in da Pilipins. Other nations insist additional knowledge be gained. Here, we shove down the standards instead.

This is educational *dagdag-bawas.* Grades are padded (*dag-dag*), so the ranks of flunkers are thinned out *(bawas)* by "passing." Knowledge gaps remain and the fiction of passing is kept. The result is a flunker's treadmill.

"Whom are we kidding?" the UN Human Development Report asks. "Our first two college years in the Philippines are often regarded as the equivalent of third and fourth year high schools" in other countries, says Copea. "The freshman course in most colleges comes out as a remedial course on high school English, Mathematics and Science."

A pass-at-any cost syndrome spills delusion over generations. Unable to read or communicate, half-literates sport devalued diplomas that can't get them jobs. Token gestures, like Cebu City Mayor Tomas Osmeña's notebooks with his mug photo, subsidized by taxpayers' money, are useless.

Needed are sustained and structural educational reform from bridge programs to adequate funding. They can be postponed only at extortionate cost.

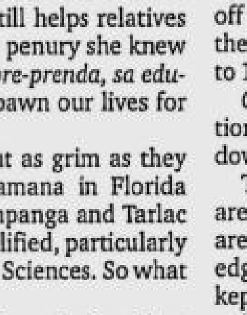
"The best in education should be for those in the worst of social conditions," Harvard's John Kenneth Galbraith writes. The alternative is a "surrender to voices of ignorance and error."

(E-mail: juan_mercado@pacific.net.ph)

Every time we say goodbye

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros



I SAW "De-Lovely" during the holidays, and I've been suffering from "LSS" since then. "LSS," as I've learned from my kids, means "last-song syndrome," the phenomenon of you humming or singing a tune repeatedly in your mind until you go bonkers. The song may be a commercial you just heard on the radio, a simple kiddy tune like the kind you hear in a carousel, or a passage from one of Bach's solo cello suites, the kind you just heard on your car stereo. The latter is by no means hypothetical, the Prelude of those suites kept going round and round in my brain for some time sometime ago, particularly as played by Yo-yo Ma.

This time, it's the song, "Every Time We Say Goodbye." The movie version was supplied by Natalie Cole, a magnificent rendition (Natalie finally earns a small place among the greats, which include her father Nat). Quite incidentally, the movie features interpretations of the songs by contemporary artists, including Robbie Williams ("It's De-Lovely"), Elvis Costello ("Let's Misbehave"), Alanis Morisette ("Let's Do It, Let's Fall in Love"), Sheryl Crow ("Begin the Beguine"), Diana Krall ("Just One of Those Things"), and several others. They give fresh twists to the songs, some de-lovely, others, well, de-leave-'em-alone.

"De-Lovely" of course is about Cole Porter, and the songs in it are his songs. Songs that have survived the turmoil and tsunami of the last century by their poignancy and wit. Songs beloved by people like Nick Joaquin, who knew every turn and phrase the way map-makers know every gulf and gully of the terrain they trace. No, more than that, who understood their nuances the way lovers understand the intricate meanings of sighs and gestures.

I remember again how befuddled a friend of mine was when he was singing at '70s Bistro and Nick requested a Cole Porter song, **any** Cole Porter song, and he was at a loss to offer one. Ah, how strange the change from generation to generation.

I'm glad at least that over the last few years there's been an invasion in popular music of something other than "acoustic," which is "standards" being sung by young musicians. I put "standards" in quotation marks because it is a relative word of course—depends on whose standards. Which means depends on whose time. Many years ago, I was bowled over to find in a record shop under "standards" the Beatles and Rolling Stones. Later I was bowled even more to find in an MP3 disc under the rubric, "oldies," R.E.M. and the Smashing Pumpkins! But "standards," as far as I know, have always referred to songs like those of Cole Porter and the Gershwin brothers, George and Ira, and their interpreters like Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald.

As I was saying, over recent years, there's been a spate of young (and not-so-young) singers recording "standards" and getting much attention for their pains. Chief of them is Michael Buble who performed here last year, and who reimmortalized the song, "That's All." Others have followed suit: Steve Tyrell, Silje Nergaard, Beverly Staunton and old fogeys like Rod Steward, who have resurrected such classics as "The Way You Look Tonight," "My Foolish Heart" and "It Had to Be You."

Harry Connick was the fellow who pioneered that revival. He was the Sinatra of the 1980s, but he probably was way ahead of his time. Kenny Rankin had an equally lovely album of "standards" in the mid-1990s called "Professional Dreamer," which has some fantastic arrangements, but he too still seemed ahead of his time. Well, they will at least have the consolation, the psychic income, if not the financial one, of knowing they sowed the seeds of a fine harvest.

My "LSS" with "Every Time We Say Goodbye" actually came from an experience while driving, shortly before I saw "De-Lovely," of hearing the song sung in the space of an hour by Michael Feinstein, Steve Tyrell and Rod Stewart, one after the other. After a while I couldn't erase from my brain the lyrics *"There's no love song finer/ But how strange the change from major to minor/ Every time we say goodbye."* And then I saw the movie, and the thing was branded indelibly in my mind.

I kind of pine for the piano bar these days, which has been shoved to the more obscure corners of the city, if it hasn't been scuttled at all. The Other Office, which has stood for 21 years, has just been sold to a Japanese, who however apparently vows to keep it a piano bar. There's Tayols somewhere in Malate and a bar in Richmonde Hotel in Pasig, but they are now a far cry from the days of Arminio's and even the Press Club when piano bars ruled the day, or night. The culprit in huge part is the karaoke, which has not only cheapened musicians' fees but universal taste as well.

I like Chuck Berry, John Lennon and Mick Jagger as much as the next rock-and-roller, but I do like slipping into piano bars every now and then, when the spirit moves me and the pocket allows, to listen to the tinkling of the piano ("a tinkling piano in the next apartment," Nat King Cole croons), and baritone voices mourning lost love. It doesn't just allow me to slip into a quieter mood, it allows me to slip into a better world, one where sophistication, urbanity and literacy reign supreme. Where wit and bon mot spread their magic wings, the kind Cole Porter flew to the top with.

You don't have to bring finery to these things to feel the fineness going to your head like a sip of sparkling burgundy brew; I suspect those who do seldom experience it. You only have to bring an open ear, and heart. The only sad thing there in fact is that it has to end some time, in the wee hours of morning invariably, and you have to stagger home and write a column next day.

Truly, that is a change from major to minor, every time you say goodbye.

Resume Erap trial—Salonga

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

EX-PRESIDENT Estrada flew into Hong Kong even his personal barber. From what I hear from HK-based friends, Erap and his gang have become truly the talk of the town. For instance, apart from the fact that his family and visitors took out a number of expensive rooms at the Adventist Hospital, people there were a bit shocked at reports that one of those rooms was used only as a "food room" for his guests. This tidbit landed on the front page of an HK newspaper. Earlier, much was said about the fabled lifestyle Erap displayed there, such as the lease of an expensive apartment overlooking the harbor.

* * *

Estrada indeed took HK by storm in a manner that even Arab potentates have been unable to do. All these, as well as his "overnight escapade" from the hospital, appear to titillate the former president, much like a little boy who suddenly found himself the center of attention. But what caught my interest more than his fabled lifestyle was the assertion of an opposition leader that upon his return to Manila, Estrada would work to unite the fragmented opposition—this in no way means he'll seek to destabilize the government—so that it could play a more crucial role in fiscalizing the government. We citizens certainly hope so.

* * *

That is a valid and legitimate goal. In the United States, for instance, after the presidential elections, the winning party immediately sets about forming the government. On the other hand, the losing party strives to consolidate and casts around for a new standard-bearer, in the hope of capturing the presidency after four years. This is the source of that country's political stability.

In this country, however, as Kalayaan College president Jose Abueva noted in an interview yesterday, using people power, which has become the preferred option of some groups wanting a change in leadership, has caused political instability. Abueva renewed his campaign for charter change, arguing that removing the top leadership in a presidential system requires a more difficult process than in a parliamentary system, which is why some groups are tempted to resort to people power.

* * *

The question is, has the Estrada camp given up destabilizing the government? Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, in a privilege speech at the Senate the other day, denied that his father is behind such plot. But the rumors about the plot have persisted since FPJ's mammoth funeral, and there are those who refuse to believe the former president is not involved. In fact, there is talk that a former close aide and adviser of Estrada had advised government leaders to allow him to cool off abroad; otherwise he wouldn't stop plotting against this administration.

* * *

In this month's Kilosbayan magazine, former Senate President Jovito Salonga opined that there's one difference between President Macapagal-Arroyo and Estrada: "GMA will probably do anything to remain in power. But Erap will do almost everything to return to power." But Salonga argues that the reported plan to stage "Edsa 4" in February may fizzle out for several reasons: "There is no compelling moral cause; the key military officers are nowhere to be found; the Catholic Church at this time does not want another display of people power; and the young people do not see any credible rallying point." Another reason may be that our people terribly long for political stability, even if there may be considerable discontentment with GMA's leadership.

* * *

In his article, Salonga interestingly traced the history of Erap's move to seek medical treatment abroad from November 2001 to December 2004. He noted that Erap's move was consistently opposed by Ombudsman Simeon Marcelo and Chief Prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio, who argued that his knee operation could be done by doctors here. Obviously, these two highly regarded officials had long sensed that seeking foreign treatment was Erap's way of delaying his trial. But the Supreme Court ignored the officials' plea for a TRO against the HK trip. On Dec. 1, 2004 the graft court granted him permission to go to HK, even though, as Salonga noted, his lawyers foisted a misrepresentation in asserting that only Dr. Christopher Mow can perform the surgery and he wanted to do it abroad.

* * *

Asserting his feeling of "distress" over the breakdown of our system of justice and the almost total absence of the "rule of law" in this latest Erap fiasco, Salonga queried, what can the judiciary do now? His answer: "Recoup and revive the rule of law, we insist, and no nonsense this time." He stressed that when Erap gets back, the interrupted trial should be resumed, and "No slow-motion system of justice." I agree, especially since the special division has had three resigned chiefs! He also urged the court to "make us proud of our own judicial system" and "regain the respect of the world." But even more important, he said, "let us rediscover our own self-respect."

* * *

The statement of Secretaries Eduardo Ermita and Leandro Mendoza, asking state witness Mary "Rosebud" Ong to show proof of her contract with the government, is hard to understand. Especially so because these two ex-military officials ought to know all about "government assets" and how they operate. I doubt if Rosebud can produce such a contract, but obviously she wouldn't have risked her life testifying against Panfilo Lacson if there wasn't such a commitment. The government should honor its commitment to its witness; even among thieves a commitment is honored. How much more the government?

Post-traumatic stress disorder

HUMAN FACE

Ma. Ceres P. Doyo

FOR those involved in the rescue, relief and rehabilitation operations in the aftermath of the recent series of disasters here and abroad, the realization that the problem is more than material and economic could be daunting. The psychological trauma of survivors could be paralyzing and the effects could be long-lasting if these are not addressed immediately and properly.

The recent killer landslides on our own home ground and the post-Christmas tsunami that killed more than 165,000 people in 11 countries and left millions bereaved and bereft have to mean something and result in something. Otherwise, is it all despair?

Last Monday, we wrote about the experiences of a team of clinical psychologists who fanned out to several disaster areas in the aftermath of the 1990 earthquake, the 1991 Mt. Pinatubo and 1993 Mayon Volcano eruptions. The team, called Heart (Holistic and Empathetic Approach to Rehabilitation and Training), was composed of Ateneo University masteral and doctoral psychology students led by Dr. Ma. Lourdes A. Carandang, a seasoned clinical psychologist, researcher and author. The effort was funded by Unicef.

One of the fruits of their experiences was the book "Pakikipagkapwa-Damdamin: Accompanying Survivors of Disasters" (Bookmark, 1996). The book is now being updated and redesigned for reprinting. It is a rich source of insights and methodology for those helping survivors to cope with their trauma and find meaning in what is left of their lives. Empowering them is even more daunting. Note that I avoid using the word victim.

That tongue-twister in the title means empathy and more. If sympathy is *pakikiramay*, empathy goes farther and deeper.

As a journalist who uses words as a medium and as one who had trained in clinical psychology and worked with the breaking and the broken once upon a time, I could not help but note the therapeutic power of words and story-telling. Naming the pain, saying and sharing one's pain, beholding the pain of others—these could be the beginning of healing.

For post-disaster rescuers and caregivers who must wade into the ocean of human sorrow and who might feel overwhelmed, bewildered and clueless, the book offers not only how-to's but comfort as well. Arellano's book also deals with the burden and burnout of the caregivers.

This "Diagnostic Criteria for Post Traumatic Disorder" crafted by psychologists and psychiatrists (and by the Heart team) could equip those out there in dealing with the pain of survivors as well as there own.

A. The person has experienced an event that is outside the range of usual human experience and that would be markedly distressing to almost anyone, that is, a serious threat to one's life or physical integrity; serious threat or harm to one's children, spouse, or other close relatives and friends; sudden destruction of one's home or community; or seeing another person who has recently been or was being seriously injured or killed as the result of an accident or physical violence.

B. The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in at least one of the following ways:

1. recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event (in young children, repetitive play in which themes or aspects of the trauma are expressed);
2. recurrent distressing dreams of the event;
3. sudden acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (including a sense of reliving the experience, illusions hallucinations, and dissociative flashback episodes, even those that occur upon awakening or when intoxicated);
4. intense psychological distress at exposure to events that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event, including anniversaries of the trauma.

C. Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma or numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by at least three of the following:

1. efforts to avoid thoughts or feelings associated with the trauma;
2. efforts to avoid activities or situations that arouse recollections of the trauma;
3. inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma (psychogenic amnesia);
4. markedly diminished interest in significant activities in young children, loss of recently acquired developmental skills such as toilet training or language skills;
5. feeling of detachment or estrangement from others;
6. restricted range of affect, that is, being unable to have loving feelings;
7. sense of a foreshortened future, that is, does not expect to have a career, marriage, or children, or a long life.

D. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal (not present before the trauma) as indicated by at least two of the following:

1. difficulty falling asleep;
2. irritability or outbursts of anger;
3. difficulty concentrating;
4. hypervigilance;
5. exaggerated startle response;
6. physiological reactivity upon exposure to events that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event (for example, a woman who was raped in an elevator breaks out in sweat when entering any elevator).

E. Duration of the disturbance (symptoms in B, C and D) of at least one month.

Note: Sometimes the onset of these symptoms could be delayed.

* * *

May I say again that there are websites that accept "tsunami donations" via credit card, among them, www.unicef.org, www.ifrc.org and www.catholicrelief.org. Some people I know who are not Internet-literate sent money and asked me to do it for them. I was touched. Unicef instantly issues a receipt in the donor's name via the card holder's e-mail.

Now please do it yourself.

* * *

Send comments to cerespd@info.com.ph

The forgotten generation

THE LONG VIEW

Manuel L. Quezon III

THE COUNTRY will be commemorating the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II very soon. And as present-day Filipinos try to make sense of that bloody and traumatic period of our nation's life, it is important to understand the points of view of those who lived through the period, before making our own judgments. For example, Michael Tan reflects the emerging fashion of not wanting to call the return of the Americans as "Liberation," but that is what an overwhelming number of Filipinos, who lived through the Japanese Occupation and the subsequent violent return of the Americans, called it. Who are present-day Filipinos to question the term adopted by those who suffered through the period?

One invaluable source on actual life during the war is the memoirs of the late Antonio M. Molina, Filipino lawyer, former dean and vice rector of the University of Sto. Tomas, diplomat, Comendador of the Order of Isabela the Catholic, which was published by New Day almost a decade ago. His book, "Dusk and Dawn in the Philippines," which can still be found in some bookstores and in book sales, is a compilation of reminiscences and extracts from his war diary and notes.

When the war broke out, Molina was a law student at UST, working part-time in one of the local courts. The war put an end to his law studies, and to his court job as well. He was able to find employment for a time at his alma mater, San Juan de Letran, serendipitously putting him in a good position to witness historical events.

Don't be turned off by the book's crude and gaudy cover. The book is an honest account of the privations and dilemmas faced by ordinary Filipinos during the war. Molina himself was loyal to his government-in-exile even as he acknowledged, without succumbing to feelings of superiority, the difficult position Filipino leaders in the Japanese-sponsored puppet republic were in. He even had jokes, such as this one:

"The agony that ate up our people found its catharsis in jokes…

"Thus, during the buy-and-sell boom, an activity engaged in by almost all the unemployed and idle professionals, it is said a man went to confession.

"'Father,' he said, 'I accuse myself of having stolen a dynamo.'

"The confessor asked him, 'Big or small?'

"'Well, not too small. It was a four-horse power.'

"Quickly the priest told him, 'Sold! I have a buyer!'"

Another story that also became very popular went this way, according to Molina:

"A Filipino asked another, 'Suppose you see Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Emperor of Japan both approaching you. Whom will you greet first?'

"'The Emperor.'

"'Why?'

"'Because Our Lord Jesus Christ would understand.'"

There are some interesting vignettes, too, from the book, such as this:

"Some days later, in one of the local movie houses, I watched the newsreel of the signing of the Constitution at the balcony of the Metropolitan Water District Offices—the seat of the Constitutional Commission—in Arroceros Street, before a rather considerable, if obviously captive, audience. The most interesting portion of the film was the covert message offered by the cameraman, when he regaled us with a close-up of the signature of Manuel Roxas—member of the Commission and, secretly, the leader of the entire guerrilla movement in the Philippines—immediately after he stamped it on the document. Indeed, the tracings in size and direction were absolutely contrary to those of his genuine signature known to so many. It seemed to me that the rest of the movie audience had caught the message, as I did, judging by the soft spoken comments I overheard.

"I am sure they would also agree with me when I say:

"'We understand, Don Manuel. Neither do we agree!'"

This is just one of the subtle signs of resistance that Molina observed.

After Laurel took his oath of office, Molina recalled, "Forthwith the new President was rendered a twenty-one gun salute as behooves a head of state. I knew not whether to laugh or give vent to my indignation when I heard a large portion of the public taking count of the salvos." They probably remember the brouhaha over the 19 gun salute mandated by Roosevelt during the inauguration of the Commonwealth eight years before, which caused some ruffled feathers!

There are other interesting stories, such as how Lorenzo Tañada, in charge of prosecuting those accused of collaborating with the Japanese, was threatened with excommunication by the Apostolic Delegate, Piani (no nuncios yet, this was pre-independence) if he filed criminal charges against Bishop Cesar Ma. Guerrero. Piani felt Guerrero, who was unpopular after the war because of his having been pro-Japanese, enjoyed "privileged forum" based on Canon Law. Tañada replied that he had do his job, but could Piani perhaps find a solution since Tañada didn't want to be excommunicated?

Piani replied, "Resign."

Molina said this was exactly what Tañada did.

Other useful memoirs are "A Diary of the Japanese Occupation," by Juan Labrador, O.P., a Spanish Dominican, published by the University of Santo Tomas, and "The Diaries and Memoirs of Felipe Buencamino III," available in a facsimile edition (which you can get at Popular Bookstore in Quezon City). The University of the Philippines Press has also reprinted Teodoro Agoncillo's two-volume history of the Japanese Occupation, which has many insights into life under the Japanese.

* * *

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Band-Aid isn't enough

YOUNG BLOOD

Erika A. Balmadres

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—Ed.

I'VE been meaning to write about the disaster in South Asia and parts of Africa brought about by the tsunamis. I just couldn't think of the right words to describe how distraught I felt.

I first learned about the tsunami while I was channel-surfing on the day it happened. CNN was reporting about a strong earthquake near the coastline of Sumatra. It was so strong that it registered 8.9 on the Richter scale. That in itself was a catastrophe.

What followed was totally unexpected and unbelievable. Tsunamis hit Sumatra, or more specifically the province of Aceh. Then, several other tsunamis hit other South Asian countries. A few even hit parts of Africa.

As of today, there are around 165,000 lives lost. They say the number is expected to rise because of possible disease outbreaks, shortage of food, etc. What's even worse, for me, is that at least 40 percent of those who died were children.

How does one react to an event such as this? I have yet to absorb the gravity of the catastrophe, but if ever I finally succeed, what can I do next? Used clothes and money can only do so much. What about all the lives lost, the bodies not yet accounted for, or those who are still missing until now? No amount of food, clothes or financial help can breathe back life into them.

This made me ask: What criteria does God have when choosing which person to take next? Does He pick the poor first to liberate them from poverty? Does He prioritize the children to maintain their innocence?

I know only He has the power and the authority to take away life because He was the one who gave it in the first place, but to take it away so suddenly and in such a brutal manner makes me doubt that He had a hand in the tragedy.

There seems to be no one and nothing to blame for this calamity, and in a world where people always find someone or something to put the blame on, this is very hard to accept. No one can produce an earthquake. It's like one of those cancers that just… happens. There was no warning and no one had an inkling about the extent of damage it would bring. It's frustrating that no matter how deeply one thinks about it, there seems to be no logical explanation as to why this happened.

Now relief efforts are intensifying. Actress Sandra Bullock is reportedly giving $1 million. Germany has pledged at least half a billion dollars. So has Japan. Help is pouring from all over the world. The amount of all the help is just overwhelming.

What bothers me though was the reaction of the United States. President George W. Bush first announced that his government was giving $35 million. After a few days (or I think after he found out that other First World countries were giving at least $100 million in aid each), he raised his pledge to $350 million. Relief operations now seem to be a contest among the most powerful countries in the world.

This brings me to yet another question: Is it just me, or is there a big shortage of genuine, unfeigned sympathy in the world today? Everyone seems to be fighting for power and recognition and compassion is being completely erased from the picture.

Maybe all this only shows that greed rules the world so that even disasters as huge and devastating as this do not touch the hearts of the powerful anymore. Maybe for God, this was the last straw. He might have been trying to call our attention through the other calamities that have been happening (the train accident in Madrid, the war in Iraq, the landslides in Quezon, etc.), but we were too stubborn or too preoccupied with our own struggle for power to even care.

In time, all the devastated areas will be rehabilitated. But then, it may just be as good as putting Band-Aid on an infected wound. And that is never enough.

Erika A. Balmadres, 22, is an AB Communication graduate of the Ateneo de Manila University.

Sign

Von Fritz Evangelista

ABOUT 165,000 people dead, and tens of thousands more missing. Thousands of homes destroyed. The tragedy caused by the killer tsunamis in Southeast Asia is indeed making history.

Was the tragedy a sign? A sign that everyone, including scientists, should be well prepared next time? A sign that living along the shores could be dangerous? A sign of the coming doomsday? We may never know.

Watching the news about the killer tsunamis ignited a serious debate among my roommates in the boarding house. One of my roommates, an intelligent one, explained why the Philippines was spared from the tragedy in a scientific way. He said the geographical location of our country kept the giant waves away. The Indochina peninsula shielded the Philippines from the Indian Ocean in the west. That was why the tsunamis didn't reach our shores. If not for this, my roommate said, a large part of the Philippines could have been wiped out, too.

Another roommate, a religious one, talked about the theological implications of the disaster. Our own God of Christianity, he said, sent the killer tsunamis to punish those countries who were practicing other religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Shintoism and other polytheistic beliefs.

That was enough to raise my interest some more. I knew ours was the only one in Southeast Asia practicing Christianity, but I could not agree with the conclusion drawn by this roommate of mine. Could our God be so cruel as to punish severely those who probably had not even heard of Him?

I could not argue against what my intelligent roommate had said since he had a scientific basis for it. But I seriously doubted the conclusion of the religious one. My own conclusion was that the killer tsunamis were not merely a sign of something but rather a plea for all of us to have a stronger faith. That the tragedy happened as the year was ending only means that we have to be more righteous in the coming years.

The year 2005 is the time to love one another. This is the year to reach out to others. This is the year for us to extend help to others. This is the year to ask forgiveness and forgive someone in return. This is the year to have a stronger faith in the Lord. For the Chinese, this is the year of the rooster. Let the rooster crow for the dawn of change, for a brighter morning.

Von Fritz Evangelista, 18, is a BS Nursing student at Riverside College, Bacolod City.

NOTICE TO YOUNGBLOOD CONTRIBUTORS:

If you are sending your contributions by e-mail, please address it to youngblood@inquirer.com.ph together with your address and information about your age and the school, course and year you're enrolled in or if employed, the position you're holding and the company you work with.

Only in our dreams

WITH THE COMING of the new year, fortune tellers, feng shui masters, doomsayers and self-proclaimed modern prophets compete in making forecasts and issuing dire warnings. Neither am I a seer nor am I possessed with a gift of foresight, but let me share with you my predictions for the year 2005.

President Macapagal-Arroyo. The famous presidential tantrum will take its toll on more Cabinet members. Inefficient and non-performing officials will receive a dressing-down from the President—on camera.

Vice President Noli de Castro will make a television comeback. But this time, on GMA 7, arguing that his No. 1 trait is consistency: "I will only work for the No. 1 TV station."

Social Welfare Secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman will be the new icon of teenagers and *fashionistas*. She will eclipse Jolina Magdangal's popularity this year. Dinky Dolls will be the in-thing by the third quarter of the year.

Former President Joseph Estrada will seek the Sandiganbayan's approval to produce a film inside his rest house: "Sa 'Yo and Lubao, Sa Akin and Tanay."

Conspiracy theorists will start circulating rumors that Da King is alive. It was a wax figure interred at the Manila North Cemetery. The truth, they'd say, is, FPJ staged his own death to get rid of traditional politicians who had been using his popularity to advance their own political interests.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson and First Gentleman Jose Miguel Arroyo will kiss and make up. Literally. "*Kung ang Diyos nga nakakapagpatawad, tayo pa?*"

A major Cabinet revamp will take place in the second quarter of the year. The public will demand the ouster of Interior Secretary Angelo Reyes, a GMA favorite. But he will be reappointed as head of a yet-to-be formed special scientific agency tasked to develop tsunami warnings. He will be the anti-tsunami czar.

Civil society leaders who were sidelined in 2004 following President Arroyo's victory in the polls will reemerge, spewing stinging remarks against the government. Among them, People's Consultative Assembly's Linda Montayre, Council on Philippine Affairs' Pastor "Boy" Saycon and Edsa 2 prime mover-turned-PCSO director-turned-government critic-and-FPJ die-hard Linggoy Alcuaz. Military and police officials will be gripped with paranoia anew and will caution against destabilizers, plotters and other enemies of the state.

Local tourism will boom following the killer tsunami that hit Phuket and other tourist destinations in South Asia. Consequently, the Abu Sayyaf rebels will regroup and take advantage of the "booming market."

And finally, the Philippine economy—which has been in the doldrums for several years now—will finally pull through and even surpass the growth of Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and South Korea. The peso will likewise rebound and the exchange rate will be $1 to P20. Inflation will be at its lowest level since World War II.

These will happen overnight. In our dreams.

—LOI REYES LANDICHO,
3/F Jacinta Bldg. 2,
Edsa, Guadalupe, Makati City

Selective Human Rights Commission

THIS is a rejoinder to Carlito Ledesma's letter titled "Silence to NPA's human rights violation." (PDI, 12/31/04) I guess the same goes with the Abu Sayyaf and Moro National Liberation Front violations.

I never heard any howl from the Human Rights Commission when the Abu Sayyaf bandits were kidnapping, raping and beheading teachers and students; and when they were pillaging towns and villages. Have charges been filed against the MNLF integrees who virtually held two barangays of Zamboanga City in 2001? Well, these people, after taking hostages and killing them and ransacking their houses, were given a free ride home. So where was the Human Rights Commission?

Oh, yes, I heard the commission complain when an Abu Sayyaf bandit was injured supposedly by an American soldier during a Balikatan exercise. Is it only the officers and members of the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines who can be guilty of human rights abuses?

Tell this to the victims of the Abu Sayyaf, MNLF, or even MILF. Tell this to the Basilan folks. Tell this to the residents of Barangay. Cabatangan and Pasonanca.

—NAME WITHHELD
ON REQUEST

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER LETTERS

Grateful for AFP men's heroism and sacrifice

I APPRECIATE the article of Romeo O. Ponte on the issue of a total log ban in Northern Quezon. (PDI, 12/30/04) And I would like to take this opportunity to commend the men and women of our Armed Forces of the Philippines who, from day one of the tragedy, have been very courageous in helping the victims of the flash floods there. I personally witnessed their heroism and the sacrifice they went through in alleviating the sufferings of the people.

I likewise salute the workers and volunteers and students of the Social Action Center (SAC) of the Prelature of Infanta who, with the Dugsong Buhay Relief, never left a stone unturned in reaching out to the victims. The SAC is the prelature's social service arm, tasked to accept donations and assistance.

Donations may be sent to SAC's office in Mt. Carmel Shrine Parish, Broadway, New Manila, Quezon City, c/o Sister Zenia, AMP, and Brother Dodong, OCD, or deposited to the account of the Prelature of Infanta (Disaster Fund), PNB Savings Account No. 2185074334, Gilmore Branch, Quezon City.

In solidarity there is hope!

—BISHOP ROLANDO J. TRIA
TIRONA, OCD,
Bishop of Infanta, Quezon

GMA sensitive to tsunami victims

CONTRARY to Amando Doronila's analysis (PDI, 1/3/05), President Macapagal-Arroyo responded with great sensitivity and concern for the victims of the recent tsunami in South Asia.

Doronila's observation was based solely on the contents of the President's New Year Message. He ignored a separate statement issued on the very day that the tsunami struck, in which the President voiced her grief and extended her condolences to the victims. A day after (Dec. 27), she also announced that the Philippine government was sending medical teams to assist the rescue and relief efforts in Phuket, Thailand and in Sri Lanka. She immediately conveyed her personal sorrow and our people's sympathy to the leaders of Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Maldives and Somalia through the Department of Foreign Affairs.

President Arroyo, in fact, personally attended the "Tsunami Summit" of world leaders, which was held Jan. 6, 2005 in Jakarta, Indonesia. She has signified the willingness of our country to help in the ongoing relief and rehabilitation efforts. She also declared Jan. 7, Friday, a National Day of Mourning for all the victims of this major disaster.

I am surprised at the abruptness and unfairness of Doronila's comments.

—MICHAEL REYES,
undersecretary and chief of staff,
Office of the Communications
Director, Office of the President,
Malacañang, Manila

Traditions heal us

YES, we are a country of traditions and, most likely, we will remain so for many years to come. Some of us may break traditions for the reason that it no longer suits our lifestyle. But sometimes tradition is the reason why we go on living.

I cannot understand why Conrado de Quiros riles against us for observing traditions after people died elsewhere. (PDI, 1/4/05) We suffer many deaths and disasters, and we deal with them in many ways. We pray, we go to our families, we drink or hurt ourselves, and yes, we even play and explode with firecrackers.

De Quiros definitely feels guilty about our living on, seemingly unconcerned, while his heart sinks at the sight of tsunami victims, and what does he say? Stop celebrating and feel for those who are suffering in other parts of the world! I didn't hear him say that when 9/11 happened, or during the genocidal war in Bosnia. But he does have a point and, believe me, a lot of Filipinos out there are doing their best to help other suffering people in their own little ways.

We, Filipinos, have somehow survived this year's tragedies with a smile and a laugh, or a visit to the local church for Misa de Gallo. I apologize if this type of therapy annoys De Quiros, but I'm sure it works for most of us. Through traditions, we try to heal our physical, spiritual or emotional wounds, even for just a day.

—ROBERT WONG,
eva_guy01@yahoo.com

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German docs make life easier for Mangyans

CITY OF CALAPAN—Volunteer German doctors have been quietly coming in and out of Mindoro for three years now, extending health services to those not usually reached by the government, with or without natural calamities and amid difficulties and threats in life.

They are part of the Committee of German Doctors (CGD), a non-government organization that sends out 250 German doctors to other countries every year.

The CGD has been in the Philippines for 20 years already and also has rolling clinics in Mindanao, Cebu, Payatas in Quezon City and Rodriguez.

CGD volunteer-members are now also in India, Bangladesh, Africa, Kenya and El Salvador.

Before being deployed, the volunteer-members are oriented and trained for two weeks in Germany.

These volunteer physicians shoulder half of their transportation and live for a minimum of six weeks on whatever board and lodging their service areas can afford.

Dr. Hellmut Lenaerts, who has practiced medicine for 30 years now, said he came to know about the CGD through their central medical journal in Germany.

He is now on his fifth week in Mindoro. "My personal motivation is to work with highly committed people."

Coming to the Philippines for the first time, Lenaerts said he could not serve the Mangyans without his team: Driver Zaldy Mapili, midwives Allyn Sanchez and Hanunuo Mangyans Ana Ingayan, Enye Tupaz and Ella Basa, and English-Filipino interpreter Analyn Bagagonio.

They spend 10 days in northern Mindoro and another 10 days in southern Mindoro, on a monthly basis.

No rest

"We virtually have no rest because if there is no clinic work, we engage in field work," said Tupaz.

Most of the team members are married, though.

The local team members receive P3,000 each per month.

Every early morning that they leave their office in the city, nobody knows whether they will be back safe and healthy.

"We would cross the river even it is flooded—like in Longgani (in Barangay Caburo in Naujan town), and would take a boat if there is one available. Our lives are in danger but we have to proceed with our work because it is scheduled," said Ingayan.

The Mangyans in the community usually tip them whenever the area they will visit is a hot spot. They then will reschedule the visit.

"Once a soldier thoroughly inspected my bag, thinking I was an NPA rebel," said Ingayan.

Mapili said they would tell the soldiers to follow them to disprove to the military men that they are supporters of the NPAs.

This happens despite having their IDs, letters from a military official and the Mangyan Mission (their partner NGO in the province) and an endorsement from the mayor.

Lenaerts, though, said he likes the more quiet and relaxed rhythm of life in Mindoro and enjoys the hospitality of his team.

"The first time we went inside a Mangyan area, the natives were afraid and hid; but when we left they came out," said Mapili.

Lenaerts team has treated diseases like tuberculosis, amoebiasis, bronchitis, pneumonia, asthma, hypertension, skin diseases, epilepsy, diabetes, urinary tract infection, diabetes, parasitism and filiriasis. *Madonna Virola, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Ex-Quezon police chief slain by communist rebs inside home

LUCENA CITY—A retired police chief was gunned down by communist assassins early yesterday.

Supt. Francis Elmo Sarona, Lucena City police chief, identified the victim as retired Senior Supt. Eduardo Sebastian, 61, former Quezon provincial police director.

Sarona said Sebastian, a physical fitness buff, was gunned down by two tricycle-riding assailants at about 7:30 a.m., shortly after he finished his routine morning exercise.

He said the victim was waiting for his golfing buddies in the open terrace of his house in middle-class RGR Subdivision, Barangay Kanlurang Mayao when the gunmen barged in and opened fire.

The victim died on the spot from at least 10 gunshot wounds in different parts of the body.

The fatal shot entered just below the right ear and exited at the back of the head.

Police found 12 bullet shells and said a .45 cal. and a 9 mm pistol were used.

Sebastian's bloodied body was found sprawled on a wood bench.

Near the bench was his pair of eyeglasses and its case. His two mobile phones were on the bloodied concrete floor.

"Based on the modus operandi and method of execution, it was the work of the NPA," said Sarona.

More than two hours after the shooting, communist spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal called up the INQUIRER and said members of the Ulpiano Anareta Jr. Command were responsible for the killing.

The NPA's Ulpiano Anareta Jr. Command operates in the province's 2nd District and the towns of Sampaloc, Tayabas, Lucban and Mauban in the 1st District.

"I congratulate all the Red fighter-operatives that were involved in the operation. They did a good job," Rosal said in a mobile phone interview.

"He had a long record of crimes against the people and the revolutionary movement," Rosal added.

But Pretty Sebastian Unson, 31, daughter of the slain police official, said his father was kind and an ideal head of the family.

"He had lots of friends. If someone was angry with him, that was only part and consequence of the performance of his former duties as a police and military officer," she told the INQUIRER. Her younger sister, Precious, a high school student in Sacred Heart College, arrived crying and immediately embraced Pretty.

Sebastian is survived by his wife Baby and four children. Nobody witnessed the actual shooting except for the wooden image of the Sto. Niño that was enshrined in the terrace near the house's main door.

Sarona said that shortly after the killing, a woman called one of the victim's cell phones.

He said the caller kept on repeating that Sebastian supposedly bungled a business deal with her.

"But I could sense that the caller just wanted to mislead the investigation and also to ascertain if the victim was really dead," Sarona said.

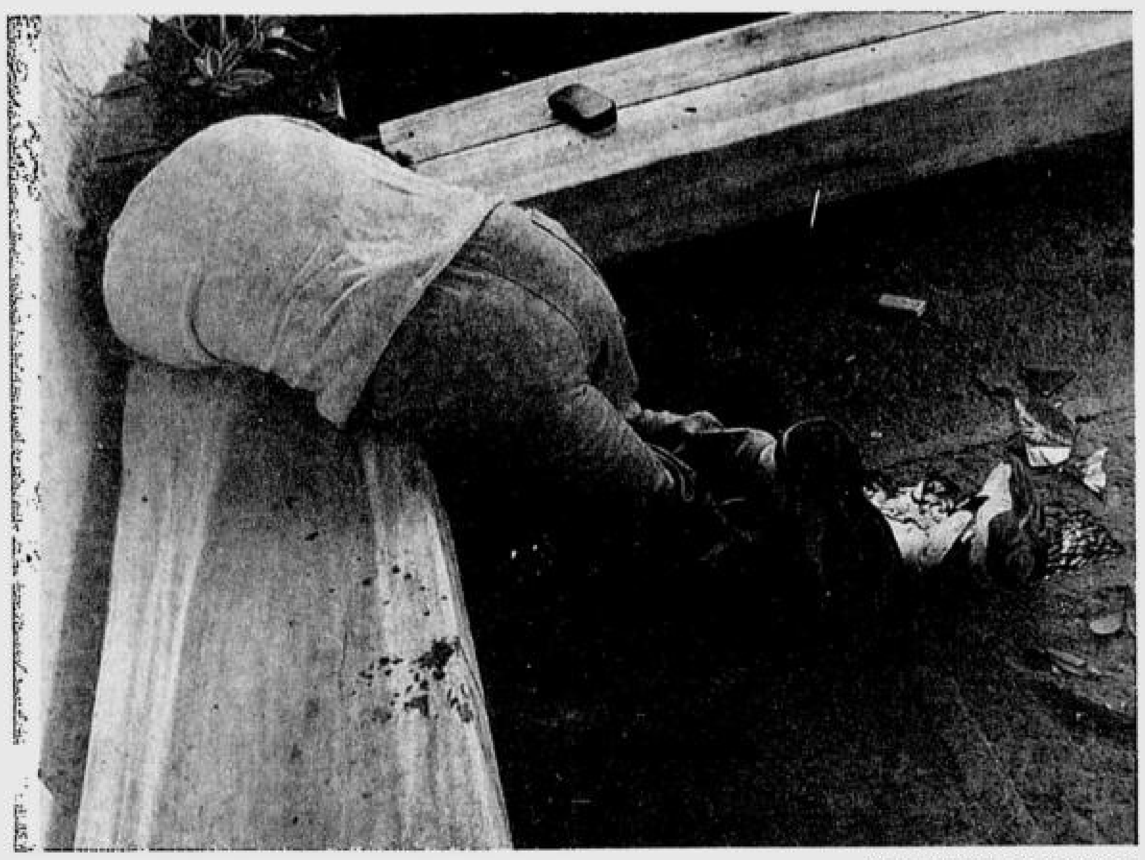
Senior Supt. Ricardo Padilla, Calabarzon police chief of staff said the NPA should just leave to the police and the government the investigation and punishment of criminals.

"He was a retired police official, already a civilian," he said.

The police immediately traced the driver of the tricycle and arrested him in his house in Lucena.

Rodel Dialola, 31, the tricycle driver, told police that three male passengers, all in their early 30s, flagged him near the entrance of the subdivision along the Maharlika Highway.

According to the driver, the group contracted him for P100 to bring them to Dalahican Port after getting something in the subdivision. *Delfin Mallari Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*


GARY GUINTO/CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

THE BODY of ex-police chief Eduardo Sebastian slumped on a wooden bench in his house.

Vagrants in Baguio exposed to meningo

By Vincent Cabreza
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

BAGUIO CITY—The city government's eyes are on "Guy and Pip" 24 hours each day, but the couple will forever be oblivious to the attention.

Guy and Pip is how residents here refer to a couple of vagrants who have been labeled along with seven others by the city social welfare office as among those at risk due to meningococcemia, said Betty Fangasan, city social welfare officer.

"They have since been placed under constant surveillance, because while people joke that their (unsanitary) condition makes them less (vulnerable) to diseases, they are actually susceptible to any illness," Fangasan said.

Benedicto Alhambra, acting city administrator, has asked Mayor Braulio Yaranon to include the vagrants in the meningococcemia containment program.

The city government had been giving out free antibiotic medicines to market vendors and jeepney drivers, after Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit identified the Baguio City public market as a prime source of contamination.

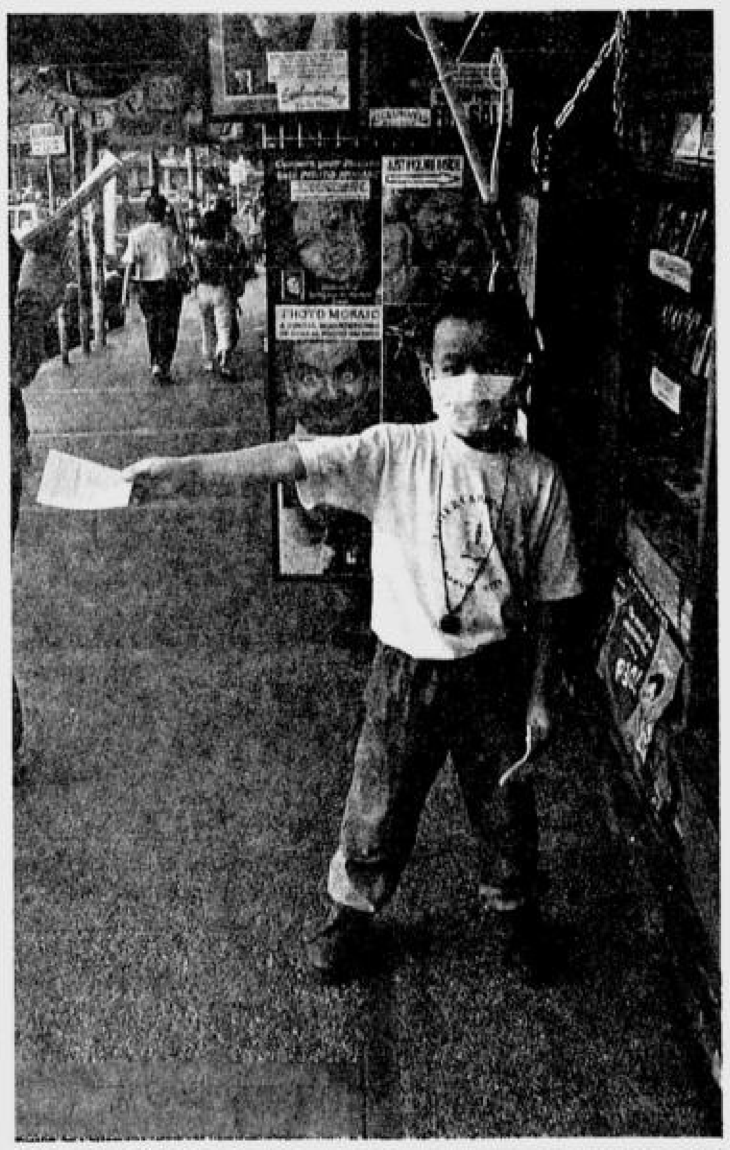
Alhambra said the vagrants were not originally on their people-at-risk list.

"This is a long-term effort because we don't want photo opportunities. We want solutions to other diseases that may hit the city in the future," he said.

Guy and Pip are probably the most celebrated Baguio vagrants. Guy is a middle-aged woman, who has a reputation for being hostile to people who "invade her space," according to a city social worker.

But she has since mellowed after she began her daily stroll around downtown Baguio accompanied by a younger vagrant, a man who was ejected by his Baguio-based family, the social worker said.

The couple attracts attention because they are always seen cuddling.


TOOTS SOBERANO/PDI NORTHERN LUZON BUREAU

A REGULAR day for this boy on Session Road in Baguio City.

Legazpi water sources yield feces, chemicals in tests made by team

LEGAZPI CITY—One of the six water sources here was tested positive for fecal coliform contamination while another was tested positive for significant levels of harmful chemicals.

The results came from tests made by a multi-agency team composed of the Commission on Human Rights-Bicol, Legazpi City Health Office, Center for Health Development (CHD)-Bicol and Legazpi City Water District (LCWD).

The agencies conducted the tests to evaluate the quality of drinking water in the city.

William Sabater, CHD-Bicol sanitary engineer IV, revealed in his report that water from the Capungohan Spring in Barangay Buyoan and another water sample taken from a faucet of an LCWD consumer in Barangay Pinaric were positive of feces.

Freshwater

The Capungohan Spring yields the biggest flow of freshwater that supplies households in this city.

"There is no adequate source protection in the vicinity of the spring. There are dwelling houses near it and people do their laundry washing and bathing in the area," Sabater said.

He added that some of the households maintain pigpens in the area and there are no diversion canals for run-offs from these areas during heavy rains.

The concrete manhole cover over the spring box is broken, rendering the water tank open to any contaminant.

The team also found excessive amounts of calcium and magnesium carbonate from water samples taken from Mabinit Well No. 2.

According to Sabater, water with excessive amounts of these chemicals is not suitable for drinking as magnesium and calcium salts have a "laxative effect."

Excess chemicals

"The hardness level of water in Mabinit is not alarming, although it nearly exceeded the national drinking water standard, because the well is interconnected with other sources—therefore its hardness is diluted by the softer water from other wells," he explained.

Sabater recommended the rehabilitation of the spring area through the construction of perimeter diversion canals to prevent surface run-offs from contaminating the water sources.

He also suggested a rule to prohibit the entry of any person inside the spring and well complex to prevent contamination.

He also suggested that water sources be treated with chlorine to make sure the water that flows into the pipes of households in the city is safe to drink.

"I also suggest tree-planting activities in the area for watershed protection," he added. *Jed Ll. Bacason, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Court gives Subic execs 10 days to answer traders' charges

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—The regional trial court in Olongapo City on Tuesday ordered Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority officials to answer within 10 days the petition filed by a group of car importers questioning the SBMA's recent suspension of the issuance of import permits.

This came after lawyer Ma. Susan Borromeo-Garcia, government corporate counsel, failed to file an opposition to the petitioners' application for a temporary restraining order (TRO).

Garcia said the case had been referred to her office only a day before the scheduled hearing on Jan. 7. She said she needed time to file an opposition to the petition.

In his order, Judge Eliodoro Ubiadas gave SBMA officials 10 days to file their "simultaneous memoranda, first on the issue of the propriety of the issuance of TRO or the writ of preliminary injunction and on the factual issues alleged by the petitioners.

The order came out after Ubiadas considered the request of lawyer Nestor Dantes, the car importers' counsel, who cited the "urgent need" for the issuance of the TRO because, he said, the importers "practically were unable to do business for the last 70 days."

On Jan. 3, officials and members of the Motor Vehicle Importers Association of Subic Bay Freeport Inc. (MVIA) asked the court to compel SBMA officials to stop violating the legal rights of investors in this former US naval base that has since been turned into a freeport.

The case stemmed from the decision of new SBMA administration to suspend the issuance of import permits to locators in October last year.

The investors said the cancellation of issuance of permits to car importers was unconstitutional and had resulted in the closure of their shops.

"After seeking all available avenues, including holding official meetings and written communications with SBMA officials, our pleas remained ignored and ended up in deaf ears," Eduardo Barretto, MVIA president, said.

The investors said they might stop their business operations and lay off thousands of employees due to the suspension of the import permits.

They said workers had stopped receiving salaries because of the losses that their companies incurred as a result of the import suspension. *Allan Macatuno, PDI Central Luzon Desk*

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INQUIRER Southern Luzon

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KARAPATAN SA MALAMPAYA IPAGLABA

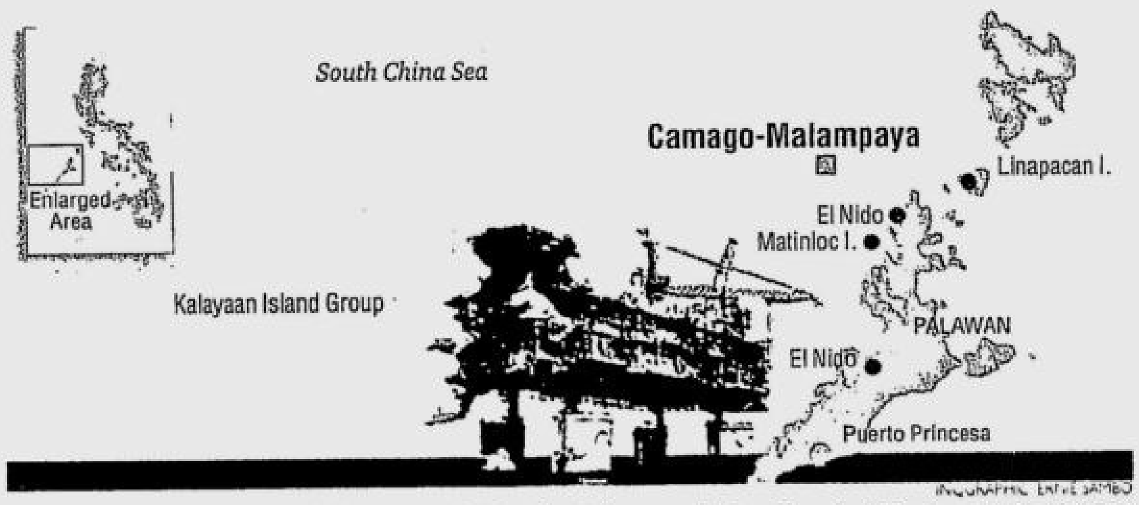
PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PROVINCIAL INFORMATION OFFICE

RESIDENTS of Palawan, including Gov. Joel Reyes (center in white polo shirt) and other provincial officials, mount a rally to assert their claim of revenue from the Camago-Malampaya Natural Gas-to-Power Project.

Palawan's gas pains

By Jofelle Tesorio
Puerto Princesa City

LIKE an old man's spasms, Palawan's claim to a rightful share in revenue from the Camago-Malampaya Natural Gas-to-Power Project, the single biggest foreign investment in the country, is getting more painful through the years.



INFOGRAPHIC ERNIE SAMBO

The province would become the richest in the country because of its revenue share, President Macapagal-Arroyo said in a speech in front of the Capitol in Puerto Princesa City in June 2001. The declaration seemingly appeased the Palaweños from the tragedy that struck their tourism and economy the month before, when the Abu Sayyaf kidnapped several tourists from a posh resort off the city.

But things have not worked out that way.

Under the 1987 Constitution, local government units (LGUs) are entitled to an equitable share in the proceeds of the use and development of the wealth in their areas. Under the Local Government Code, the LGUs shall have a 40-percent share of the gross collection by the national government from mining taxes, royalties, forestry and fishing charges, and from any co-production sharing agreement in the use and development of the national wealth within their territorial jurisdiction.

The provisions were backed by pronouncements of then President Fidel Ramos and his successor, Joseph Estrada.

Ramos, through Executive Order No. 381, said, "Palawan is expected to receive about $2.1 billion from the total government share of $8.1 billion" from the proceeds of the Malampaya project over a period of 20 years.

Off Palawan

Immediately after Ms Arroyo's pronouncement in June 2001, the Department of Finance recommended a review of the validity of the issuances of Ramos and his energy secretary, Francisco Viray.

On July 25, 2001, after the review, then Chief Presidential Adviser Avelino Cruz wrote a memorandum for the President, saying that the DOF failed to consider special laws that expressly state that the territory of Palawan extends to the open sea and its marine reserves, and that Malampaya is consistently part of Palawan.

Cruz recommended seeking an opinion from the Department of Justice.

The DOJ opinion denied Palawan's revenue share, saying that the province's territory was limited to its land area. The DOF argued that the offshore project is located 80 km from the main island Palawan.

On Oct. 16, 2001, Gov. Joel Reyes immediately wrote the President a "strong expression of claim due to the Province of Palawan from the share of the Camago-Malampaya Natural Gas Royalties."

Petition

The administration offered a financial assistance package equivalent to 20 percent of the government's earnings. The proposal was unacceptable, Reyes said. Instead, the provincial government presented a counterproposal containing some of the recommendations of the Palaweños to the government panel.

The negotiation ultimately reached a deadlock. Reyes, through a provincial board resolution, terminated further talks on the proposed MOA. He sought the board's authority to settle the controversy in court.

In particular, the provincial government asked the court to declare the provisions of EO 381 issued by Ramos, providing Palawan's projected earnings at $2.1 billion over the next 20 years, to be in accord with existing rules and regulations on territorial jurisdiction.

It also urged the court to declare the phrase "territorial jurisdiction" to extend beyond the 15-km limit of municipal waters. It argued that the provincial board had already enacted an ordinance that established and delineated the territorial jurisdiction of Palawan, which includes the Kalayaan Group of Islands (KIG), the Camago-Malampaya area, and other island groups.

Kalayaan

The KIG belongs to Palawan by virtue of Presidential Decree No. 1596, issued on June 1978, creating the municipality of Kalayaan, the petition stated. "If a group of islands farther west from the mainland forms part of the Province of Palawan, the more reason should a nearby marine area forms part of the territorial jurisdiction of the same."

The Camago-Malampaya area is nearer the Palawan mainland than the KIG.

Moreover, the provincial government is also banking on RA 7611 or the Strategic Environmental Plan for Palawan, which identifies the territory of Palawan as including the surrounding seas and marine areas. This extends beyond the so-called 15-km municipal waters to include the Camago-Malampaya area.

In its reply, Solicitor General Alfredo Benipayo said the island municipality of Kalayaan never became part of Palawan despite its creation by a presidential decree. He reasoned out that PD 1596 had legal infirmities because it did not go through the required constitutional process.

No plebiscite had taken place to create the municipality, he added.

Benipayo said that the territorial jurisdiction of an LGU referred only to land area as he assailed the provincial ordinance delineating Palawan's territory. Only Congress can enact such law, he asserted.

The SolGen said the pronouncements of Ramos and Viray were considered mistakes or mispronouncements. As such, the state cannot be put on estoppel, a legal term that suggests "sleeping on one's rights," he said.

Continental shelf

While the case is pending in court, a group of sociocivic-minded Palaweños, backed by a former local government secretary and an international lawyer, filed a petition for certiorari, prohibition and mandamus against the national government.

This time, Ms Arroyo was included in the lawsuit, along with the budget, finance and energy secretaries.

In their petition, former Local Government Secretary Cesar Sarino and the Kilusan Love Malampaya accused the President and her Cabinet members of violating the Constitution and undermining national patrimony.

They cited in their legal claim the Extended Continental Shelf (ECS) under the 1982 United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (Unclos III), to which the Philippines is one of the signatories.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SPEX

THE CAMAGO-Malampaya Platform is dragged by barges from Subic, Zambales, where it was built to the project's onshore site.

The petitioners, through Harry Roque, a noted international lawyer, contended that Palawan was the strong and secure anchor on which the Philippine claim for an ECS of 200 nautical miles from the baseline of the mainland.

"Clearly, the Camago-Malampaya oil and gas fields, from the Unclos III definition, fall within the area of the continental shelf of Palawan as the natural prolongation of its land territory," he said.

The oil and gas in the area are piped out from deep into the subsoil of the continental shelf of Palawan, and not from the waters of Palawan, he pointed out.

The KIG and Malampaya are said to be forming part of the ECS of Palawan.

Another KLM lawyer, Joselito Alisuag, said the national government had failed to answer the petition up to now, resulting in a judgment by default. The court could hear and decide solely on the basis of the petition, evidence and witnesses. Thus, the national government lost its chance to argue its case.

Benipayo requested for an extension of time to answer the petition several times, but the court did not allow it the last time.

Shares

In 1989, relatively large fields were discovered in the deep waters off Palawan when Occidental tested gas in its Camago structure. The next year, Alcorn Philippines discovered the West Linapacan Field and began production two years later until 1996.

From 1992 to 1996, the national government, through the DBM, faithfully and consistently released and remitted to the provincial government its 40-percent share from the West Linapacan Oil, which is situated about the same distance offshore as the Camago-Malampaya project.

Records from the provincial treasurer's office showed that Palawan also received P972,071 from the 1997 and 1998 collections in Matinloc, Nido and West Linapacan fields.

On Jan. 4, 2003, it received P2.1 million as its share from the excise tax on energy.

Also, in 1990, Shell discovered the Malampaya gas field—becoming, by far, the largest gas discovery in the country, according to a DOE report.

The department added that the inventory of the Philippine petroleum resources showed that the country's total risked petroleum resources was about 9 billion barrels fuel oil equivalent. More than half of the volume is estimated to occur offshore of west Palawan and the Sulu Sea regions.

This means that Palawan could get at least $15 billion from the proceeds of the use of these resources.

Sale of shares

Desperate to cover up the financial crisis, Energy Secretary Vincent Perez announced the sale of about 4.9-percent shares of the government in the Malampaya consortium recently.

Palawan Rep. Abraham Mitra (second district) was quick to deliver a privilege speech in Congress in September opposing the plan, saying it would, in effect, strip the right of the government over the project because it only had a 10-percent stake through the Philippine National Oil Co.

"It is also giving free access to Koreans," Mitra said, because the national government had allegedly preferred the Korean state-owned Korean Gas Corp. (Kogas).

Mitra said it was a negotiated deal since there was no bidder other than Kogas. He added that it was not the right time to sell because the offer was too low.

If it was imperative to sell, the shares should be sold through the usual privatization process, Mitra said. This way, a Filipino could buy the shares.

Mitra and Rep. Antonio Alvarez (first district) wrote Perez to state their objection to the contract. "Privatization is not advantageous to the Philippines in the long run," their letter said.

The lawmakers doubted that the $200-million projected sale would make a serious dent in the fiscal deficit.

They charged that it was another "sweetheart deal" in the making because the Korean company already had an inside track of the deal following its announcement to buy the Philippines' stake in the consortium.

Mitra, however, has yet to make a statement regarding the agreement between the national government and SPEX and Chevron Texaco to extract only gas and not oil in Malampaya.

Financial crisis

While the LGUs are still in a quandary over sources of local revenues, Palawan is taking a second look at Malampaya. The province plans to impose taxes on the platform and other machinery used in exploring the Camago-Malampaya.

The contractor, SPEX, has not answered the letters sent by the provincial assessor's office demanding it to declare the company's real properties used in Malampaya. As usual, SPEX referred the office to the DOE.

Provincial assessor Salvacion S. Pacaldo said his office assessed the property in Malampaya to be worth P1.2 billion on July 30, 2004. It sent its first letter to SPEX on Aug. 4.

Basic tax for real properties is one percent of total assessed value. Another 0.5 percent of the one-percent basic tax is collected for special educational fund.

From this, Pacaldo said, the LGU could collect around P47 million in taxes for one year.

The commercial operation in Malampaya started in 2002, so SPEX is subject to back taxes from 2002, she added.

Tax exempt

However, SPEX could have a good reason not to pay, according to Vice Gov. David Ponce de Leon, because the "Service Contract 38 for the development of the Malampaya Gas Project favors SPEX as the holder with tax exemption—virtually from all kinds of local taxes."

The contract was entered into by the SPEX and the national government in 1990, earlier than the effectivity of the Local Government Code in 1992, which was the basis of the assessment.

But Pacaldo is not bending. If SPEX is exempted local taxes, Provincial Ordinance No. 332-A still requires the company to file a sworn declaration of assets, which is filed between January and June, every three years. If SPEX defaults, it could be fined an equivalent of one percent of the total market value of the property, which amounts to more than P19 million, she argued.

More than money, the Church, in its pastoral letters, said that recognition was a moral thing to do for the national government.

"The Palaweños are not greedy and selfish and are more than willing to share its bounty with the rest of the country and help the national economy with its huge budget deficit," one pastoral letter said.

Governor Reyes aired similar sentiments in earlier interviews. He said that as long as the national government recognized Palawan's rightful share and rights over its territory, the province was willing to help and share what it had.

The message may not be appealing to the Arroyo administration, but Palawan's gas pains are rooted only in one word—recognition.

IN THE KNOW

A lot of gas but for whom?

NATURAL gas, dubbed the "fuel of the future," is formed underground over millions of years by the decomposition of organic matter in a similar way that oil and coal are formed. In its natural state, the gas is colorless, odorless and lighter than air

In 1989, Occidental Philippines Inc. (Oxy) discovered a small natural gas reservoir called Camago. Shell Philippines Exploration B.V. (SPEX) then acquired a 50-percent stake in the project from Oxy. Shell discovered the Malampaya gas field which was linked to the Camago fields. Further drilling confirmed natural gas reserves 70 km northwest of Palawan.

In 1998, Malampaya's commercial viability was declared and Shell eventually bought out Oxy. Texaco Inc. later acquired 45 percent of Shell's interest. Gas Sales and Purchase Agreements were subsequently signed with First Gas Philippines and the National Power Corp. between 1997 and 1998.

On Oct. 16, 2001, President Macapagal-Arroyo formally inaugurated the $4.5-billion project.

Malampaya has gas reserves of about 2.7 trillion cubic feet. It is expected to reduce the country's oil import bill of $3 billion by $700 million.

SOURCES: PDI ARCHIVES, MALAMPAYA WEBSITE

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SUERTRES 7 5 4

FOUR DIGIT 1 1 4 0

(In exact order)

MEGALOTTO 6/45 8 11 16 30 38 43

SWEEPSTAKES 2 5 9 3 3 0 P

Transport groups want as much as P20,000 in fines for road violations

By Clarissa S. Batino

THE NEXT time you are tempted to break a traffic rule, think twice or be prepared to dig deep in your pocket.

The Land Transportation Office (LTO) said yesterday it would soon start collecting fines of as much as P20,000 for a violation.

LTO spokesperson Lovely Quipot made the announcement following a hearing Tuesday attended by representatives of all major public transport groups.

She explained that the transport groups were more open to higher penalties than higher license fees.

The LTO has started public hearings on its plan to raise fees and fines by an average of 170 percent.

LTO chief Anneli Lontoc said the agency had not raised its fees for the past 12 years. She said a fee hike would allow it to collect P500 million more annually.

On top of the rate hike, the LTO would start penalizing motorists for the unauthorized use of sirens, which it plans to penalize with a P700 fine. However, transport groups wanted the fine at P5,000.

Only the President and other top-level executive and legislative officials are allowed to use sirens.

"We notice that even the CEOs of big companies use sirens. Once the new fees and charges are approved, we would start running after them," said Quipot.

Quipot said transport groups wanted a penalty of P20,000 for those caught illegally transferring plates. Currently, the offense entails a P750 fine.

For out-of-line public vehicles, transport groups proposed P6,000 for the first two offenses plus franchise suspension. The third offense would result in franchise revocation.

Quipot said transport groups wanted a new rate of P350 for both professional and non-professional licenses. The current fees are P150 for non-professional and P240 for professional licenses.

New witness hopes to boost Nida case

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE DEPARTMENT of Justice has included in its Witness Protection Program another witness in the murder of actress Nida Blanca, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said yesterday.

Gonzalez placed Fedelyn "Mariz" Canonio, 20, in the WPP after she was presented to the media yesterday at the DOJ, where she also met for the first time Kaye Torres, Blanca's daughter.

"She is here to say that she is ready to give her testimony. She has nothing to fear since we've placed her under the WPP," Gonzalez said.

He said Canonio would corroborate the testimony of star witness Andrada "Anji" Dalandas and prove that Dalandas was at the Atlanta Centre building in San Juan after midnight on Nov. 7, 2001.

Blanca was found dead inside her car in the building's carpark on the sixth floor later that day.

Gonzalez said the DOJ was still waiting for another witness, a man from Marinduque, who saw three persons fetch Blanca from the Atlanta Centre on Nov. 6, 2001.

The justice secretary said he would review the records of the case before the DOJ would file a second extradition petition against Rod Lauren Strunk, Blanca's husband and a primary suspect in the case, who has fled to the United States.

Torres said she hoped that with Canonio and Dalandas' testimony, Strunk would soon be extradited back to the country.

"The fight is not yet over. This is just the beginning. We're in for the long haul," she said.

Gonzalez earlier said that he hoped Dalandas' testimony would address the "concerns" that the US court raised when it dismissed the first extradition petition against Strunk.

California Judge Gregory Hollows denied the government's first request against Strunk in November 2003 due to the "conflicting and inconsistent evidence" that were submitted.

Dalandas had identified through National Bureau of Investigation pictures of Strunk, Philip Medel Jr. and businessman Mike Martinez as among the four men who brought an unconscious Blanca back to the Atlanta Centre.

She claimed that she also saw Medel punch Blanca on the left side of her face as the actress was transferred in her car.

Gonzalez said Dalandas was frightened and fled from the scene. She later heard the van leave, he added.

The government had charged Strunk and Medel before the Pasig City Regional Court for the actress' killing.

Strunk left the country on Jan. 21, 2002, to tend to his ailing mother in California. He had since refused to go back to the Philippines.

FEDELYN Canonio

Dry run on for bus scheme

By Margaux C. Ortiz

IN PREPARATION for the full implementation of the Organized Bus Route (OBR) on Edsa, the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) has started conducting a dry run for city buses in the northern part of the metropolis.

MMDA Chair Bayani Fernando said they had been requiring buses bound for Don Mariano Marcos Avenue (Commonwealth) and Novaliches to pass through the recently completed Fairview terminal.

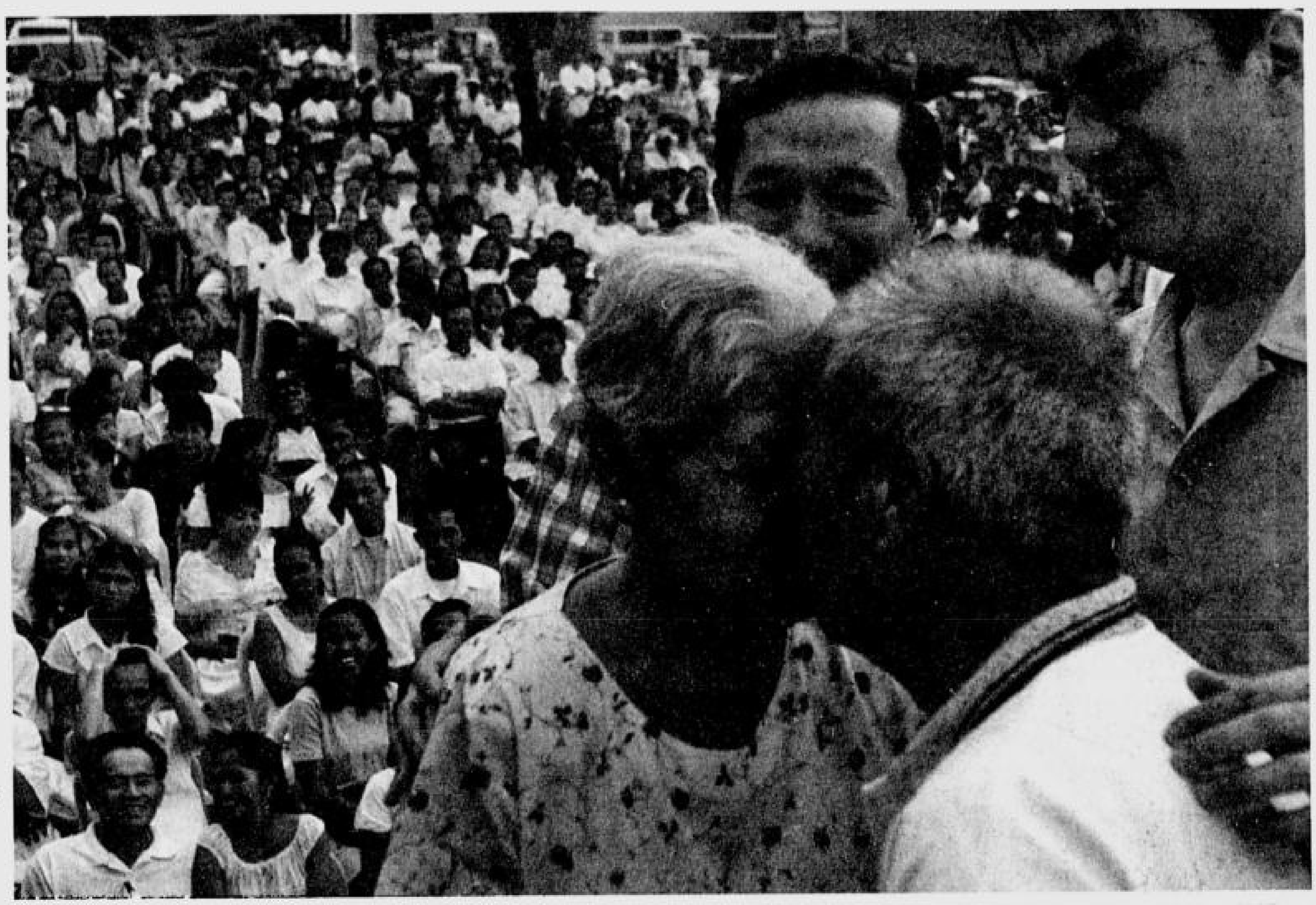
"With the completion of the terminal, we are almost ready to fully implement the scheme," Fernando said, adding that they were still waiting for the queue cards to be delivered.

The MMDA had earlier decided to implement the scheme in the main thoroughfare this month as a long-term solution to the traffic problem on Edsa.

Under the scheme, the buses would be kept in endpoint terminals and then sent out depending on the number of passengers along Edsa at a given time.

The buses would be dispatched from two existing endpoint terminals in Navotas and Baclaran and three new terminals in Metropolis Mall in Alabang, Robinson's Mall in Fairview, and the Food Terminal Inc. in Taguig.

Fernando stressed that traffic enforcers would confiscate the licenses of drivers who fail to return any of the 6,000 queue cards, and impound their buses.



PROVING that it is never too late to say 'I do,' 60-year-old Ricardo Salceda kisses his bride Editha Genobia during the mass wedding of 195 couples at the Navotas town hall yesterday. At right is Navotas Mayor Toby Tiangco who sponsored the event. JIM GUIAO PUNZALAN

Special holiday to mark Navotas' 99th year

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

STUDENTS, government and private employees in Navotas will be treated to a break tomorrow after Malacañang declared Jan. 14 as a special non-working holiday in the coastal town.

The municipality is commemorating its 99th anniversary with a weeklong celebration which started on Monday.

The Navotas Municipal Council had requested Malacañang to declare Friday a non-working holiday because the town's foundation day on Jan. 16 falls on a Sunday.

The local government has allotted P2 million for the weeklong celebration.

Yesterday, 195 couples participated in mass wedding ceremonies, part of the anniversary festivities the local government had lined up, information officer Jerry Doringo said.

A street parade with policemen, government employees and students as participants has been scheduled tomorrow.

On Sunday, residents will be treated to a fireworks display and a concert at the Navotas Transport Terminal. The event would also launch the countdown to the town's 100th year, Doringo said.

Once a part of Malabon, Navotas was declared a separate town in 1906. Now, it has 14 barangays with a population of about 250,000. The town hopes to attain cityhood before its 100th anniversary next year.

Navotas is one of only three remaining municipalities in the metropolis. The others are San Juan and Pateros.

Water rationed in Metro

By Christine Gaylican

THE WATER supply for Metro Manila residents and other consumers has been reduced in the last few days, with the diversion of the basic need to Bulacan and Pampanga for the irrigation needs of its farmers, the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) said yesterday.

Customers serviced by concessionaires Manila Water Company Inc. and Maynilad Water Services Inc. will temporarily experience water supply cuts to enable rice farmers cultivating some 25,000 hectares of farmlands to harvest by the end of February to March, NWRB executive director Ramon B. Alikpala said.

"We have cut back the water allocation for Metro Manila-based residents and industries by at least four cubic meters per second to help farmers complete their harvests," Alikpala added. The NWRB manages the water supply from Angat Dam—Manila's main water source that also supplies irrigation water to 16 municipalities in Bulacan and four towns in Pampanga.

Since the devastating typhoons in Quezon province, the NWRB has had to allocate the dwindling water supply from Angat Dam as repairs on the Angat-Umiray water tunnel were expected to be finished in the next three months. Consumers should conserve water in anticipation of a further lowering of the water level at Angat Dam because of the coming dry spell, Alikpala said.

The antismoking ban and Jinggoy

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

SEN. AQUILINO Pimentel Jr. has complained that some of his colleagues in the Senate smoke in the Senate building in violation of a national law against smoking in enclosed public buildings.

Legislators who continue to smoke in enclosed public places are either ignorant of the law or just plain arrogant.

Ignorance of the law doesn't excuse them. If that were so, they have no business being in Congress because they pass laws.

If it's arrogance - they consider themselves above the law - well, many politicians ran for their respective positions because they want to be above the ordinary citizen. In short, they want to belong to the "privileged class."

Pimentel was apparently referring to Senators Jinggoy Estrada, Lito Lapid, Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr., Rodolfo Biazon, and Sergio Osmeña III when he made the complaint.

Biazon and Osmeña probably couldn't help themselves because they're addicted to cigarettes. It was probably not their intention to hurt other people with their cancer-causing smoke, or they just forgot there is a law against smoking in public places, RA 9211. But that doesn't excuse them.

It's certain that Lapid is not only ignorant that such a law exists, he's plain ignorant.

The same is true for Revilla. He might not have been aware of the law against smoking. Although he didn't go to college, he is more literate than Lapid since he finished high school in the United States.

The worst kind is Jinggoy Estrada. He thinks that since he's a senator of the republic, the world—or at least the Philippines—owes him a living.

If I know Jinggoy, his mentality could be summed up in what he would probably say to anybody who would point to his lighted cigarette: "So what? Are you a senator? You should become senator first before you question what I do."

Before his father Erap was run out of office by an angry mob at Edsa, Jinggoy had this attitude that he was above the law. I think he still has that kind of attitude.

Several months before his father was ousted, Jinggoy went to Los Angeles with his friends. Aboard a Philippine Airlines jetliner, Jinggoy, then mayor of San Juan, smoked with his friends inside the first class section's lavatory.

Smoking in an international flight en route to the US is a federal offense even if the aircraft is not yet over US territory. The flight crew that allows a passenger to smoke on a US flight is as equally liable as the offending passenger.

Word of Jinggoy's smoking reached the pilot. Through a flight attendant, the pilot sent word to Jinggoy and his friends that they were violating a US federal law.

What was Jinggoy's reaction? The flight attendant, to whom Jinggoy addressed his comment to the pilot, quoted him as saying: "*Siguro anti-Erap yang piloto n'yo* (Your pilot is probably anti-Erap)."

Now, you know why Jinggoy ran for the Senate: he wanted to be in power so his chances of being acquitted of plunder charges are big. After all, the Senate is a Big Boys Club and his colleagues would help him and his father, his co-accused in the plunder case, get off the hook one way or another.

Manila scores against tax hike opposition

By Tarra V. Quismundo

AN ATTEMPT to suspend the imposition of higher real estate taxes in Manila has been stopped dead in its tracks after a court dismissed a petition for a temporary restraining order (TRO) sought by one of the city's congressmen.

"This court has carefully evaluated the legal arguments of both parties and it has reached the conclusion that the petitioners were not able to show by clear evidence that they are entitled to [a TRO]," said Judge Reynaldo Ros of the Manila Regional Trial Court Branch 33.

Ros handed down the decision on Tuesday.

In seeking a TRO, Rep. Jaime Lopez (second district), his nephew Manuel Lopez, and lawyer Reynaldo Aralar said that Ordinance 8079, which hiked real property assessment levels and consequently the taxes due, was illegal and unconscionable.

They explained that it came at a time when the economy was problematic.

City Hall said the tax hike aimed to give the city roughly P750 million in additional revenue which it planned to use for its urban renewal projects.

Mayor Lito Atienza hailed the court's decision, saying the order of Ros affirmed the validity and legality of the city government's decision to increase real property assessment levels.

Ros was the second judge to handle the case after Branch 25 Judge Aida Rangel-Roque inhibited herself from handling the case. Roque said she was also a real property owner in Manila.

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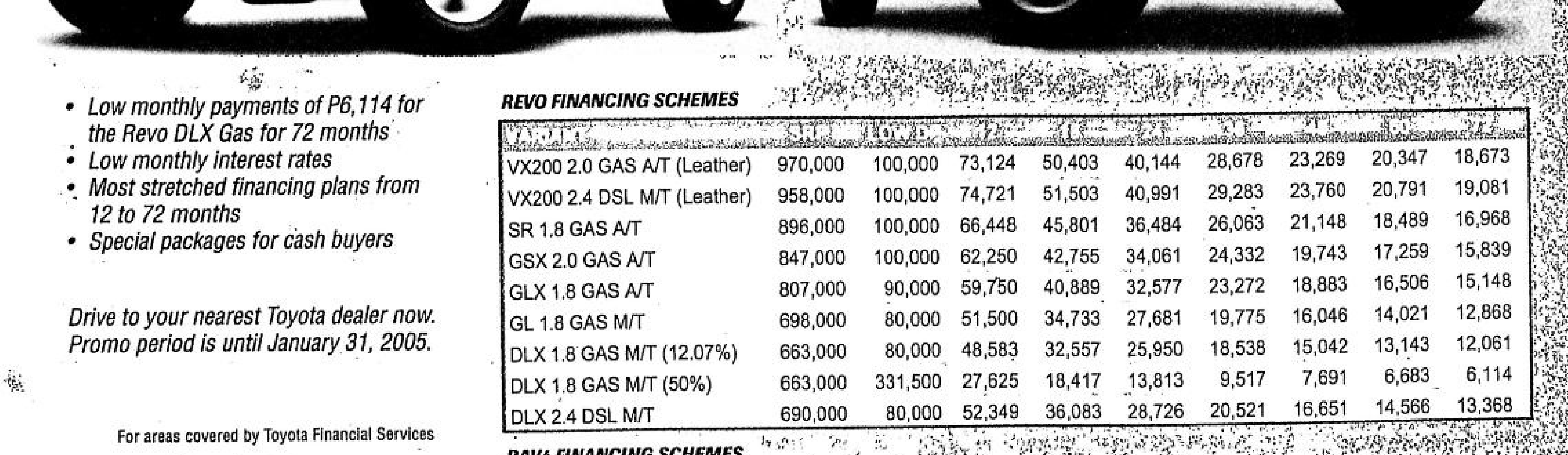

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VARIANT	SRP	LOW DP	12	18	24	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
VX200 2.0 GAS A/T (Leather)	970,000	100,000	73,124	50,403	40,144	28,678	23,269	20,347	18,673
VX200 2.4 DSL M/T (Leather)	958,000	100,000	74,721	51,503	40,991	29,283	23,760	20,791	19,081
SR 1.8 GAS A/T	896,000	100,000	66,448	45,801	36,484	26,063	21,148	18,489	16,968
GSX 2.0 GAS A/T	847,000	100,000	62,250	42,755	34,061	24,332	19,743	17,259	15,839
GLX 1.8 GAS A/T	807,000	90,000	59,750	40,889	32,577	23,272	18,883	16,506	15,148
GL 1.8 GAS M/T	698,000	80,000	51,500	34,733	27,681	19,775	16,046	14,021	12,868
DLX 1.8 GAS M/T (12.07%)	663,000	80,000	48,583	32,557	25,950	18,538	15,042	13,143	12,061
DLX 1.8 GAS M/T (50%)	663,000	331,500	27,625	18,417	13,813	9,517	7,691	6,683	6,114
DLX 2.4 DSL M/T	690,000	80,000	52,349	36,083	28,726	20,521	16,651	14,566	13,368

RAV4 FINANCING SCHEMES

VARIANT	SRP	LOW DP	12	18	24	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
4x4 A/T	1,268,000	100,000	103,579	71,395	56,801	40,577	32,925	28,821	26,450
4x2 SV M/T	1,048,000	100,000	83,733	57,715	45,921	32,805	26,618	23,299	21,382

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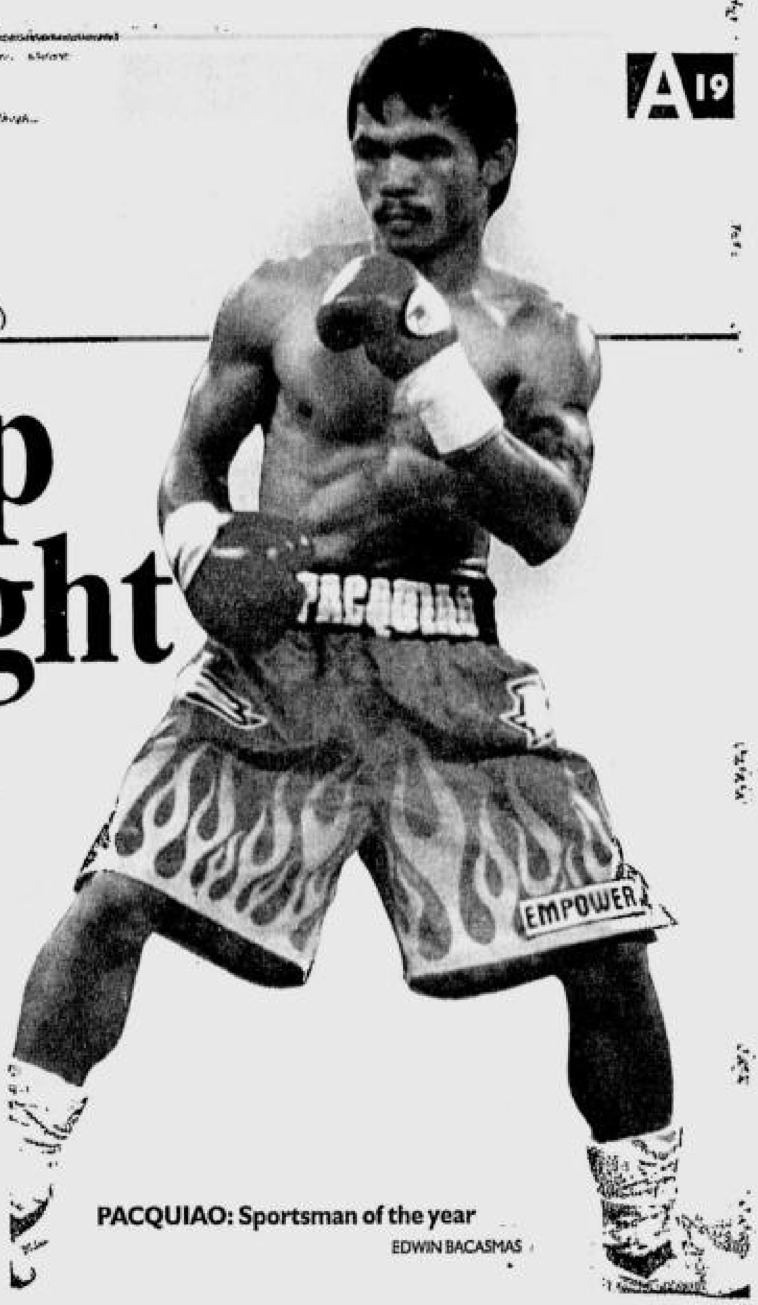
PSA honors top athletes tonight

ROSALES: Sportswoman of the year ROMY HOMILLADA



PACQUIAO: Sportsman of the year EDWIN BACASMAS

THE COUNTRY'S top sports achievers of 2004 will be honored in simple but fitting rites tonight by the Philippine Sportswriters Association (PSA) at the Manila Pavilion, with golfer Jennifer Rosales and boxer Manny Pacquiao leading the list as Sportswoman and Sportsman of the Year, respectively.

The 90-minute affair begins at 8 p.m. with guest of honor and speaker Jose 'Peping' Cojuangco, Philippine Olympic Committee (POC) president, leading officials and friends of sports in honoring the year's best athletes.

Rosales, 26, and who scored a breakthrough LPGA Tour win in the Chick-Fil-A Championship, has taken time out to personally receive her award from the country's oldest media organization.

Pacquiao will not be around as the pride of General Santos City is currently in Los Angeles training for his coming 12-round bout with former World Boxing Council (WBC) champion Eric Morales.

Other than the traditional plaque handed out by the PSA, both Rosales and Pacquiao will also be given an Epson printer.

NBN-4 will cover the event to be aired on a later date. Sponsoring the affair hosted by amateur basketball star Alex Compton and Lala Roque

PSA/ A22

Pacquiao has bigger punch for Morales

By Freddie Roach *as told to Recah Trinidad*

LOS ANGELES, California—I've always wanted Erik Morales. It's the bigger fight.

I believe it's the better fight for Manny Pacquiao.

Style-wise, it can be a much, much better fight than the Marquez fight.

Marquez is a shifty, effective boxer. But he doesn't make an exciting mix against Manny.

We got a game plan against Marquez but we've to change that.

We've got to get in and dominate Morales.

Then we take on Barrera again, that's the next fight I would like for Manny.

Yes, there will be changes but they won't be drastic.

We will be working on the right hand. I want Manny to fight Morales with both fists.

Manny will have to grow from a fighter into a real boxer himself.

No, I can't say we've got the edge.

All I can say is that Morales is "hittable." He's easy to hit. Marquez is a lot more defensive.

Morales likes to exchange punches—and that would be his mistake.

Of course, Morales will be a little bigger. They fight at 130 pounds.

But Manny can carry himself well and he could also be a lot stronger.

Manny is mature enough.

Being a little taller, Morales likes to fight.

He likes to show off he can take a punch and that's gonna be his downfall.

That fight which Morales lost against Barrera?

I don't think it will have a telling effect.

But it could be used as a gauge.

Barrera won that one but he didn't dominate Morales.

If Barrera could beat him (Morales) like that, I think Manny can do a lot better.

Of course, we can't just stand in front of him.

Manny is moving into new territory.

Morales, taller, would fight a lot from outside.

But we will cut that edge in inches by staying close.

We won't also push Manny all the way up to 130 pounds.

If he comes in at 126 or 127, that would be just fine.

Two or three pounds won't make much difference.

Manny does not have to come in bloated.

He has the edge in speed, he has the better side-to-side moves.

Manny has the bigger punch.

Manny will be there at his best.

This will be a very exciting fight.

The better man will win.

Colossal battle to lure 200 million viewers

IT WILL be a battle of global magnitude when reigning Ring Magazine featherweight king Manny Pacquiao and Erik Morales fight over 12 rounds on March 19 as an expected 200 million people will get the chance to watch the fight "live."

Home Box Office, which will air the fight set at MGM's Grand Garden Arena, revealed that over 50 million pay-per-view homes will get the chance to witness the colossal matchup, and with a conservative estimate of four persons per household, should result to 200 million people tuned in to see who between the two warriors has indeed got the rocks. That number is highly conservative, considering that almost everyone in the Philippines and Mexico will tune in for the bout.

"Fight fans are going to see an all-action fight from bell to bell," promised promoter Bob Arum who, together with Murad Muhammad, is putting up the show.

Meanwhile, the Pacquiao-Morales pay-per-view telecast has a suggested retail price of $44.95 per issue.

Tickets for the fight, which are priced at $400, $300, $200, $125 and $75, not including applicable service charges and taxes, will go on sale Friday at the MGM Grand Garden Arena box office, according to Fightnews. *Salven Lagumbay, Contributor*

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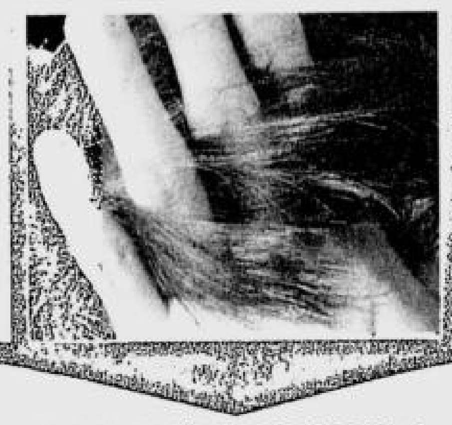

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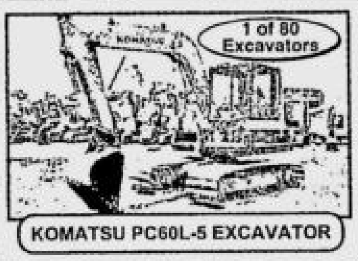

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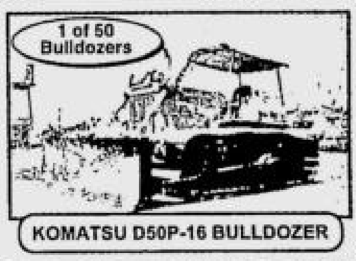

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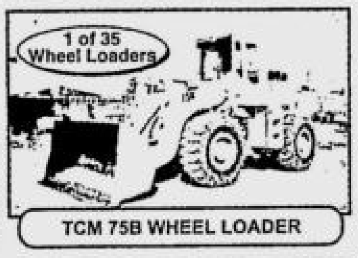

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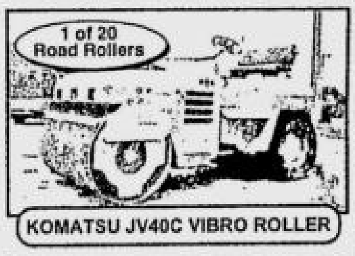

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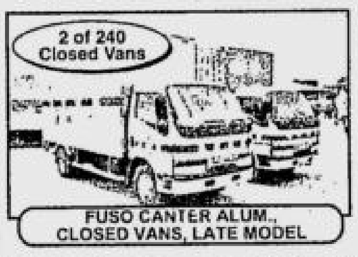

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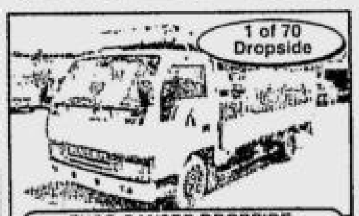

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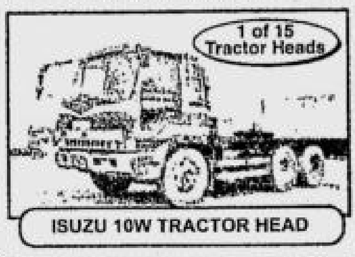

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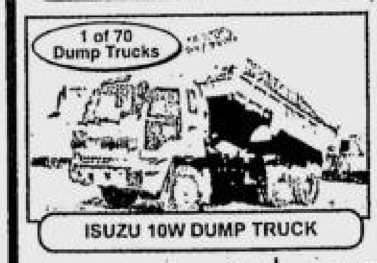

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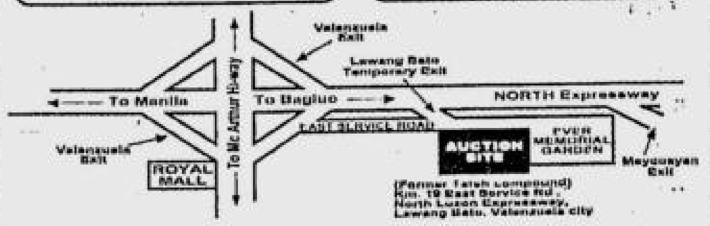

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WPT BELLAGIO

Nat'l five aspirants labor through fitness tests

ERIC Menk huffed in the sit-ups. Tony dela Cruz puffed in the 30-yard shuttle run. And rookie Arwind Santos wowed them all in the standing vertical leap.

In the end, however, 10 Philippine Basketball Association stars and three amateur standouts shared the view that the three-hour fitness tests conducted by national coach Chot Reyes and strength and conditioning specialist Dennis Aenlle yesterday at the Moro Lorenzo Sports Center were a resounding success.

Ginebra's Jayjay Helterbrand, Mark Caguioa, Rommel Adducul and Menk came in full force, although Caguioa begged off from undergoing the strenuous tests because of a sore knee.

Caguioa will join Talk 'N Text players Mark Telan, Yancy de Ocampo, Jimmy Alapag and Willie Miller on Saturday for the next round of tests, along with other available pros and amateurs.

Coca-Cola's John Arigo, Ali Peek and Rafi Reavis will no longer take the tests, having done so last Dec. 30.

Reporting for the 9 a.m.-12 noon schedule at the Moro Lorenzo gym, other than the four Ginebra players, were Ren-Ren Ritualo and Mark Pingris of FedEx, Rico Villanueva, Junthy Valenzuela and Lordy Tugade, who also asked to be tested later on Saturday, Shell's Tony dela Cruz and Rich Alvarez, Purefoods' Billy Mamaril, and amateurs Anthony Washington, JR Reyes and Santos.

"It's a definite plus if you get high scores," Reyes told the initial members of the RP training pool before the session began. "But it doesn't mean you won't be selected if you get low scores. This will just form the quantitative portion of the selection process."

The tests were conducted to determine the candidates' agility, strength, stamina, flexibility, footwork, leaping ability and speed. Their nody fat was also measured.

The tests began around 10 a.m.

First was a 10-lap trot around the facility's third-floor oval followed by stretching exercises in the weights room.

Next was a series of leg-tangling footwork activities designed to determine a player's nimbleness, or lack of it.

Santos soared two inches above everybody else, leaving even Menk amazed.

The Kings' 6-foot-6 star center, however, topped the sit-ups, the push-ups and the pull-ups, which left everybody sore and aching.

RTC INJUNCTION

Asi suspension stays, says Eala

By June Navarro

THE PERMANENT injunction issued by a Manila court against the Department of Justice and the Bureau of Immigration on the cancellation of Asi Taulava's citizenship would in no way affect the Philippine Basketball Association's earlier decision to suspend the Talk 'N Text center.

"It's a case which does not necessarily affect the decision of the PBA at the moment. We are not party to it and I see no immediate legal impact on the league," said commissioner Noli Eala yesterday.

Judge Romulo Lopez of the Manila Regional Trial Court branch 34 had ordered a permanent injunction last week, preventing the DOJ and the BID from canceling the Filipino citizenship of Taulava issued in 2001.

"The injunction was issued to stop the summary deportation proceedings on Taulava. As far as I know, it has not touched on the DOJ findings, where the PBA based its decision," said Eala.

What concerns the league more, Eala pointed out, is the ongoing case Taulava filed against the PBA in a Quezon City court. Taulava's lawyers had filed a motion to lift the suspension of the 2003 MVP twice but the QC RTC had denied it on both instances.

Eala said the league would study the implications of the injunction and at the same time consider how it would affect the stand of the PBA on Taulava.

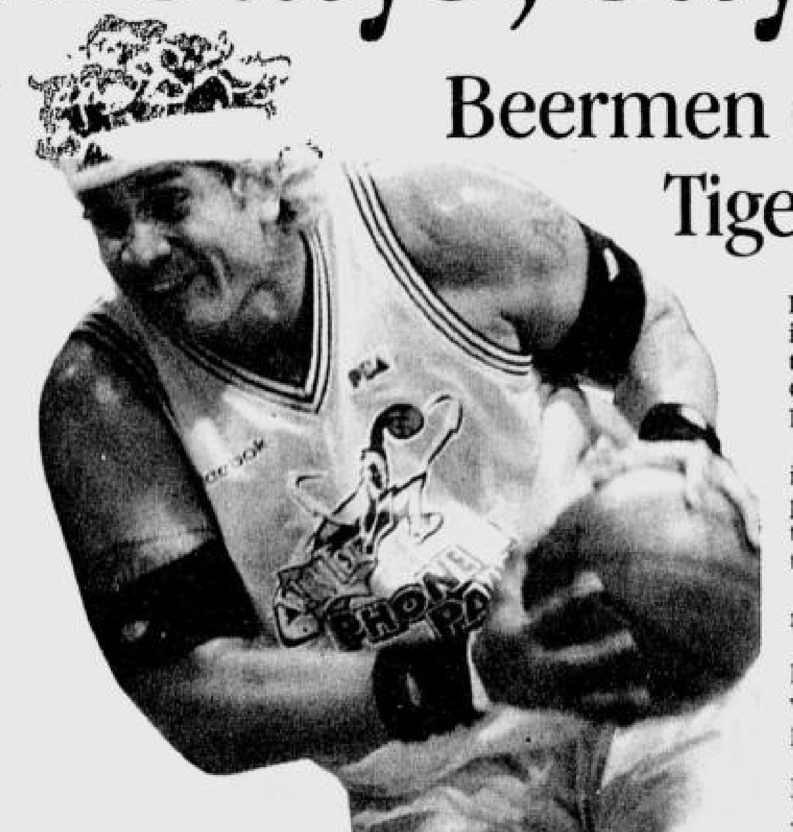
The league suspended Taulava based on the findings of the DOJ, which ruled the citizenship papers of the Talk 'N Text star and five other foreign-born players were spurious based on a Senate report.

"We will study it and present it to the Talk 'N Text management. But in fairness to them (TNT), they have not asked the league to lift Asi's suspension. I don't want to preempt any formal decision that could be made in the future," said Eala.

In a decision dated last Jan. 6, Judge Lopez said the DOJ and the BID cannot "denationalize him (Taulava) on the basis of inconclusive pieces of evidence which were gathered without affording him his day in court."

A holder of a Philippine passport, Taulava represented the Philippines in the 2004 Busan Asian Games and has two daughters with his Filipino wife, the former Anna May M. Corveau. He won the PBA MVP award in 2003 playing for TNT.

The court said the DOJ and the BID, including the committee headed by BID executive director Roy Almoro tasked to investigate the alleged aliens playing in the PBA, had no authority and jurisdiction to cancel the recognition of Filipino citizenship (under identification certificate No. 019159) issued to Taulava four years ago.



TAULAVA gets another reprieve from the court.

Beermen oust Realtors; Tigers even series

DONDON Hontiveros hit a big triple in the dying seconds and San Miguel's defense held on to eliminate Sta. Lucia, 81-77, last night in the Gran Matador PBA Philippine Cup at the PhilSports Arena.

Hontivers finished with 23 points, including a 4-of-10 clip from beyond the arc, and played tight defense on Kenneth Duremdes as the Beermen, down by 14 at one point, swept the best-of-three wildcard series.

The Beermen advance to a quarterfinal meeting against Alaska.

Coca-Cola, on the other hand, stayed in the hunt for a quarterfinal berth with an 81-74 victory over Purefoods in the first game that pushed their series to a sudden-death match.

The Tigers held Purefoods scoreless in the last two minutes and leaned on John Arigo, Ato Morano and Rob Wainwright on the offensive end to arrange a decider with their victims for the right to face the Shell Turbochargers in the quarterfinals. *June Navrro*

Eagles face Knights for q'final slot

GAMES TODAY (Pasig Sports Center)
2 p.m.—Granny Goose vs Air Philippines
4 p.m.—AMP-Ateneo vs Toyota Otis-Letran

IT'S win or bust for AMP-Ateneo today.

The Eagles, suddenly in quarterfinal contention, try to sustain their impressive run when they meet the Toyota Otis-Letran Knights today in the PBL Open championship at the Pasig Sports Center.

"The game is so crucial for us so we need to play harder to prevail," said Eagles coach Sandy Arespacochaga of the 4 p.m. knockout match with the Knights.

AMP-Ateneo's quarterfinal chances used to look bleak. But after stringing up recent victories, including back-to-back wins over formidable teams Montaña and Welcoat, the Eagles now have a shot at the quarterfinals.

A win gives AMP-Ateneo the third quarterfinal slot with the Knights still keeping faint hopes of advancing if ICTSI-La Salle loses to powerhouse Welcoat on Saturday since they own two earlier victories over the Archers.

If the Knights prevail, they would automatically bring the Archers with them to the quarterfinals as La Salle had also beaten Ateneo twice.

The Eagles, Knights and the Archers have identical 5-8 win-loss cards so far.

There will be no worries, though, for Granny Goose when it faces lowly Air Philippines earlier at 2 p.m.

The Tortillos, who are assured of a twice-to-beat advantage in the quarterfinals, will try to wrap up their elimination campaign with three straight victories.

The Knights squandered their playoff chances against Granny Goose last Saturday. After leading almost the entire game, they fell apart down the stretch and lost, 69-67.

"This happened to us many times," said coach Louie Alas then. "We lead for three quarters and then we lose in the end. We really need maturity to sustain our lead."

Indeed, Alas will try to avoid another huge collapse against the Eagles, who routed the Knights in the first round, 56-44.

Meanwhile, the Flight will try to avoid the ignominy of tying the league's longest losing skid at 12 games against Granny Goose, which it beat, 78-76, in the first round. *Jasmine W. Payo*

Butch admits equipment delay looms

By Marc Anthony Reyes

PHILIPPINE Sports Commission officer in charge Butch Ramirez yesterday admitted that there might be a delay in the importation of equipment for the Southeast Asian Games later this year due to the long process of bringing in large-scale sporting goods to the country.

Ramirez said the PSC, which will be at the forefront of such a deal, will have to issue letters of credit to suppliers here or abroad which could take three months to complete.

"We only have 10 months to the SEA Games, so that would leave us with just seven months. That's if the equipment arrive on time," said Ramirez during his first media briefing at the Rizal Memorial Sports Complex.

The issue cropped up after a member of the Philippine SEAG Organizing Committee expressed concerns that the equipment won't come in time, which is crucial not only for the training of the national athletes but also for the country's hosting of the event.

Bondad fires 71, leads RP Ladies Amateur by a shot

By Musong R. Castillo

FRANCES Bondad bogeyed her last two holes and settled for a level 71 yesterday and a one-stroke lead over Aileen Rose Yao after 18 holes of the Smart Gold Philippine Ladies Amateur Open at the Manila Golf Club course.

Bondad finished with a 34-37 card, hitting five birdies against the same number of bogeys which spoiled what would have been an outstanding round by the 16-year-old reigning titlist.

Yao, a former junior standout, birdied her first four holes in the back nine to submit a 72, one ahead of joint third placers Crystal Superal and Christabel Goh of Singapore.

World Amateur veteran and former champion Carmelette Villaroman never got it going and checked in with a 74 for solo fourth.

Jayvie Agoyo hit only six greens and submitted a 75, which Korean Ji Yeonwoo and Thai Suteera Chanchai matched as the best scorers among the much ballyhooed foreign bets.

Hong Kong's Mak Wi Jun Demi turned in a 76 while Nontayan Srisawang of Thailand, her country's reigning national champion and winner of last year's Hong Kong Open, could do no better than sign for a 78.

The 17-year-old Srisawang played the first 10 holes at even par then stumbled over a seven-hole stretch where she parred just once while taking a fat 8 on the par-4 12th hole.

"I made a lot of silly mistakes today," said Bondad, the Australian-born daughter of Filipino parents.

After missing a three-foot birdie on the 16th, she chunked her second shot on 17 and then hit a tree while trying to reach the green in two on the par-5 18th, where she was lucky to escape with a bogey.

Anya Tanpinco and Melissa Loh of Singapore were joint seventh with 77s even as 10-year-old Dottie Ardina and last year's runner-up Lora Roberto joined a huge group that turned in 79s.

The First Gentleman Foundation and Herma Group and Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office are the major sponsors of the Open.

The leading scores:

71 – Bondad (AUS); 72 – Yao; 73 – Goh (SIN), Superal; 74—Villaroman; 75 – Agojo, Changchai (THA), Ji (KOR); 76 – Mak Wi (HK); 77 – Loh (SIN), Tanpinco; 78 – Srisawang; 79 – Ardina, Lina de Guzman, Heng Su Ann (SIN), Sok, Hwee Koh (SIN), Roberto, Woo Young-kyung (KOR).

BONDAD: On track of her title-retention drive

Martinez secures IM title

FILIPINO National Master Rolly Martinez drew his ninth and final round match recently to assure himself of the International Master title in the 2005 Verona Chess Festival in Verona, Italy. The Santiago, Isabela, native Martinez of San Jose del Monte, Bulacan, split the point with Fide Master Giampaolo Buchicchio of Italy to amass 5.5 points after nine rounds of play, 1.5 behind GMs Miroljub Lazic of Yugoslavia, Jozsef Horvath of Hungary, Michele Godena of Italy and Sabino Burnello, also of Italy. Martinez's total, however, was good enough for his third and final IM result. Another Filipino entry, Roland "Kulot" Salvador, scored 6.0 points and finished in a tie for 5th to 8th places with GM Lexy Ortega and FM Luca Shytaj of Italy and IM Mihajlo Stojanovic of Yugoslavia. ***NM Marlon Bernardino***

2 foreign bets, Filipino share International Jr golf spotlight

LEUNG Kwan Jermiah Kim of Malaysia, Hong Kong's Chan Tsz Ching and Carlos Fabregas of the Philippines shared the spotlight yesterday at the start of the eighth Samsung Philippine International Junior Golf Championship.

Leung, who turned 10 last Christmas Day, tamed the Wack Wack Golf and Country Club's East course with a two-under-par 70 from the black tees to pace boys' Class D.

Chan, a primary sixth grader at the former Crown Colony's Man Yan, shot a 73 marked by an eagle and three birdies from the blue tees to take the early girls' 12-and-under lead.

And Fabregas, the 15-year-old Metro Manila bet, came up with a two-over 74 from the blue tees to take a one-stroke lead in the boys' Class A limited to players 15-17 years old.

The three are among the 94 players from eight countries competing in the tournament Philippine Junior Golf Federation president Edgardo "Boy" Cantada launched in 1998.

The Philippines' John Kier Abdon came up with a 73 to take the early lead in the boys' Class B (13-14 years old) and Wolen Juan Superal scored a 76 to pace the boys' Class C.

La Salle eyes 6th straight win

DE LA Salle, oozing with confidence following a big straight-set victory over erstwhile unbeaten UST over the weekend, shoots for its seventh straight victory as it plays Far Eastern U at resumption today of the Shakey's V-League second conference at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum.

Although odds are on La Salle's side owing to its superb form that netted six victories after an opening day setback to UST last November, expect the Lady Archers to go flat out for a win against the Lady Tams in their 5 p.m. encounter.

For one, La Salle wants to keep in step with UST at the helm heading into the crucial stage of the eliminations of the event sponsored by Shakey's Pizza.

FEU, with a woeful 1-6 (win-loss) card, is sure to unleash whatever force it has in its arsenal to stop the Lady Archers and keep its flickering semis hopes alive.

Equally interesting is the Lyceum-San Sebastian encounter at 3 p.m. where the Lady Pirates, tied with the Letran side at fourth with 3-4 slates, try to get the inside track in their battle for the fourth and last semis berth in the event co-presented by Dunkin Donuts, HBC Home of Beauty Exclusives, Smart and PLDT with Mikasa and Accel as official volleyball and outfitter, respectively.

The Lady Stags, like the FEU belles, hope to stay in the hunt with a 1-7 mark.

Admission is free with the Lyceum-SSC match to be shown live on IBC-13. The DLSU-FEU clash will be telecast tomorrow, also beginning at 3 p.m.

Lyceum is coming off a thrilling victory over FEU where it battled back from two sets down to turn back the Morayta-based spikers, 21-25, 22-25, 25-21, 25-16, 15-12.

The rampaging Lady Archers haven't dropped a match in five weeks.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Philtobo chief backs tests

By Edwin Villanueva, *Contributor*

"I HAVE always been in favor of the EIA (equine infectious anemia) test on racehorses."

Philtobo chief Bienvenido "Nonoy" Niles Jr. declared this yesterday as he reaffirmed his solid support to the program initiated by the Philippine Racing Commission to combat the dreaded EIA.

"I'd like to categorically state that I will continue to back the fight against the EIA to ensure that all horses in Philippine racing and breeding industry are healthy and free from any infectious diseases," said Niles as he debunked reports that he refused to have his horses tested for the EIA virus.

In fact, Niles stressed that he had his horses tested twice already in the past four months.

"Maybe some quarters misquoted me when I said that since my stable is located at the far end of a row of stables in Santa Ana, then I would be one of the last to be tested this time." said the affable Niles, a respected horse owner-breeder. "As president of the Philippine Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Organization and an avid horse racing enthusiast, I enjoin everyone in the industry to unite in safeguarding the health of all our horses."

Niles and top officials of the Metropolitan Association of Race Horse Owners (Marho) and Klub Don Juan de Manila (KDJM) signed an agreement of support for the Philracom campaign against the EIA virus late last year.

The groups then reassured Philracom chair Jimmy Dilag of their "100 percent support" during the Philtobo Horse Show in November.

That manifestation of unity got the nod of Congressmen Benhur Abalos, Mikey Arroyo, Luis "Baby" Asistio, Abraham Mitra and Mark Cojuangco.

Niles' stable is one of the biggest in the country. Along with his wife Angie and son Pierre, Niles races noted local gallopers such as Elite, Windlass, Smokin' Red, Fear Factor, Paramount, In Command, Formidable Ella and Simply Gold as well as imports Mossette, Mavista and Glamour.

INQUIRER COMICS Sunday
Favorite comic strip poll

ANO'NG COMICS TRIP MO?!!

① Choose from the titles below:

a. Ragnarok

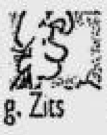
b. Darna

c. Garfield

d. Mother Goose & Grimm

e. Pugad Baboy

f. Inday Wanda


g. Zits

h. Full House

② Text inqvote <corresponding letter of choice>

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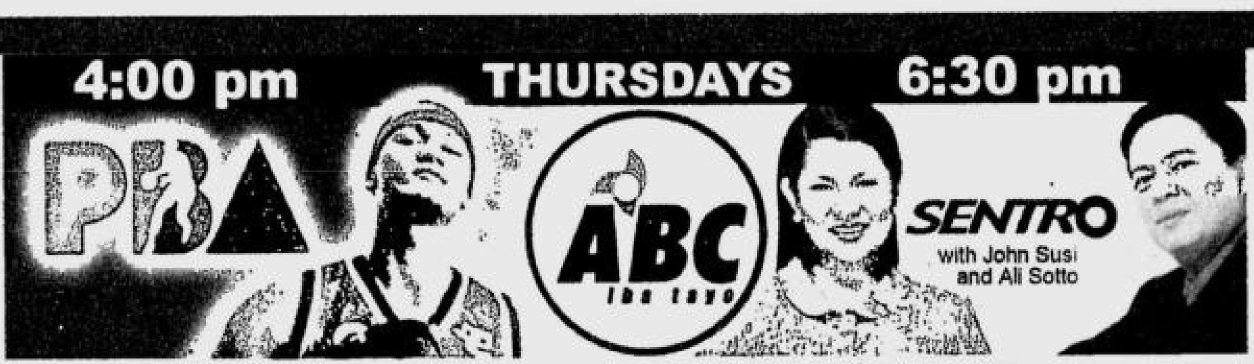
per dti-ncr permit no. 0064 series of 2005

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER TV GUIDE

Thursday, January 13 2005



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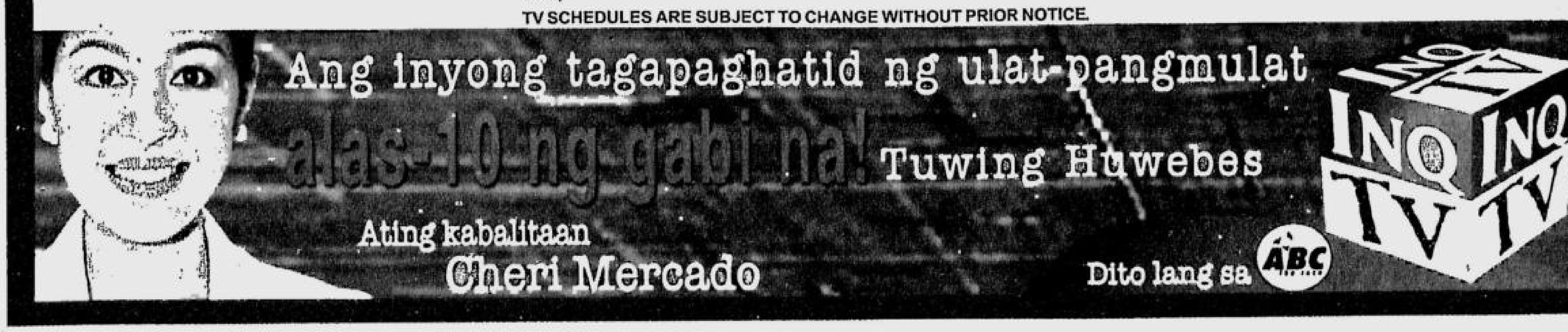
Channel	2:30PM	3:00PM	3:30PM	4:00PM	4:30PM	5:00PM	5:30PM	6:00PM	6:30PM	7:00PM	7:30PM	8:00PM	8:30PM	9:00PM	9:30PM	10:00PM	10:30PM	11:00PM	11:30PM
ABS-CBN 2				Showbiz No. 1	Sandara's Romansa	Get Backers	Ragnarok	Masked Rider Ryuki	TV Patrol	Spirits	Krystala	Lovers In Paris	Hiram	Star Circle Nat'l Teen Quest	Maalaala Mo Kaya			Insider	Dong Puno
NBN	Value Vision				Teledyaryo	Value Vision		APEC Primer 3		Network Forum		Teledyaryo		Musconi Cup 2003				Dial M	
ABC 5			Problema Nyo, Sagot Ko	PBA					Sentro	PBA					Big News	Inq TV		Fearless Fighting	Billboard On-Air
GMA 7	Leya (2:45PM)	Joyride (3:15 PM)	Snow Angel (3:45 PM)		One Piece	Witch Hunter Robin	Slam Dunk	24 Oras		Extra Challenge		Mulawin	Starstruck (8:45 PM)	Forever In My Heart (9:15 PM)		Magpakailanman			Saksi
RPN 9	Metro TV Shopping			Hey Arnold!	As Told By Ginger	Wild Thornberries	Sponge Bob	Entertainment Tonight	Wrestling		NBA On RPN					Newswatch Now	Video Hit Parade	Kasangga Mo Ang Langit	Police Hour
IBC 13		V League				IBC Express Balita		Pangarap Kong Jackpot		Retro TV		Travel	Japan Video Topic		Entrepinoy	Good Take	IBC News Tonite		
Solar		WWE Smackdown				Mutant League	Heavy Gear	Maxsteel	Dungeons And Dragons	Babylon V		Thunder Box		JAG		Ninth Gate			
Nickelodeon	Dora, The Explorer	Little Bear	Blues Clues	SpongeBob SquarePants	All That	Are You Afraid of the Dark?	100 Deeds of Eddie McDowd	The Amanda Show	The Adventures Jimmy Neutron	Fairly Odd Parents	SpongeBob SquarePants	As Told By Ginger	Nick Mix		100 Deeds of Eddie McDowd				Rugrats
MYX		Urban MYX	MYX Backtrax	Pop MYX	OPM MYX	Take 5	My MYX	MYX Daily Top Ten		Mellow MYX	Rock MYX	Pop MYX	Urban MYX	MYX Presents		My MYX	MYX Backtrax	OPM MYX	Mellow MYX
ETC		Good Morning Miami	What I Like About You	The Today Show		Starting Over		NBC Nightly News	Entertainment Tonight	Will & Grace	JKX	Ed		Girls Behaving Badly	Simple Life 2	Tonight Show With Jay Leno		Blind Date	Fifth Wheel
Cinema One		Tumayo Ka't Lumaban				Muling Umawit Ang Puso				Ms. Kristina Moran				Dama Ang Pagbabalik				Tisoy's Enemi No.1	
Studio 23	Bewitched	Urban MYX	MYX Backtrax	UAAP				X-Men Evolution	Samurai Deeper Kyo	Wazzup Wazzup		Barkada Nights				News Central	The Oprah Winfrey Show		Spin City
AXN		Snatch				The Amazing Race		Gensomaden Saiyuki	Gensomaden Saiyuki	7 Days		30 Seconds To Fame	30 Seconds To Fame	Record Setters		Post Midnight			
Star World		The Bold & The Beautiful		Hollywood Squares	Home Improvement	Ally McBeal		The Simpsons	The Drew Carey Show	Star News Asia	Friends	Sting: Inside The Songs Of Sacred Love		The Chronicle News From The Edge		My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiance		Friends	Sting: Inside The Songs Of Sacred Love
CNN				Business International		Larry King Live		World News	World Sport	Business International		World News Asia		World News	World Sport	World News Asia		World News	World Sport
National Geographic	On Assignment	Innovation		Frontiers Of Construction		Riddles Of The Dead		The Snake Wranglers	Croc Chronicles Dr. Brady Barr	Wild		About Asia		Nat'l Geographic Specials		Innovation		Frontiers Of Construction	
Solar Sports		ATP Heineken Open '04 Finals			GWS ep.54	Phil-9 Ball Open '04 Finals				Copenhagen Masters MxdD Final			NBA TV Daily	NBA Game L.A. Lakers vs. Denver					NBA Inside Stuff
Lifestyle Network	Secret Gardens	The Fix	Mission Organization	Carol Duvall	Molto Mario	Hot Off The Grill	Good Eats	Extreme Cuisine	Unwrapped	Tyler's Ultimate	E! News Weekend		Good Finds	Clean House		Breathing Room	Genuine Article	Guess Who's Coming To Decorate	
HBO	Midnight Heat (2:35 PM)			Laughter On The 23rd Floor			Bleacher Bums (5:40 PM)				Beverly Hills Ninja			What A Girl Wants			The Adventures Of Pluto Nash		
Star Movies			Hollywood One On One	The Assassination File			Married To The Mob (5:45 PM)				Visitors (7:25 PM)			Holy Man				Fear (10:55PM)	
Cartoon Network	Scooby-Doo Show	The All New Popeye Show		Tom & Jerry Show	Baby Looney Tunes	Sylvester & Tweety Mysteries	Police Academy	He-Man & The Masters Of The Universe	Teen Titans	Yu-Gi-Oh!	Gundam Seed	The Looney Tunes Show		The Powerpuff Girls	Codename Kids Next Door	Mr. T	Josie And The Pussycats	Boomerang - Boomeraction	Yu-Gi-Oh!
ESPN		2004 Int'l Chall of Champs Unc, CT USA World Pool Masters '04 Ann Zan, Holland Premier Snooker League '04 Crny Durham UK				Sportscenter Taiwan	World Pool League '04 Warsaw, Poland		Premier Snooker League '04 Cardiff Wales				Sportscenter Asia						
Disney Channel	Kim Possible	Totally Spies	Lizzie Mcguire	Even Stevens	That's So Raven	Martin Mystery	Totally Spies	The Legend Of Tarzan	Lilo & Stitch/Un-[illegible] Bunny	America's Funniest Home Video	Wonderful World Of Disney			My Wife And Kids	That's So Raven	According To Jim	America's Funniest Home Video	Wonderful World Of Disney	
Cinemax		The Counterfeit Traitor (3:15 PM)					Lone Hero			Charlotte Gray				Thrill Seekers			Mary Shelley's Frankenstein		
Hallmark Channel	Mad About You	Robin Cook's Acceptable Risk				Play With Me Sesame	Sesame Street		Bewitched	Agency II		Strong Medicine		Fabio Montale II			Sue Thomas: F.B.Eye		Agency II (11:25PM)
Discovery Channel		Hour Asia				Wild Discovery		Ultimate Discovery		Monster Garage		Ultimate Cars	Building The Ultimate	Wild Science		Ultimate Discovery		Power Zone	
MTV Philippines		MTV Asia Hitlist		Non-Stop Hits		Non-Stop Hits		MTV Get Spotted	MTV Loveline		MTV U-Break	MTV Jams	Rouge	TRL		Globally Dismissed	Pimp My Ride	VH1 Hits/Video Collection	
Sports Plus	FED Cup SFinal France vs. Spain				Pac 10 Arizona @ California					Porsche rnd 2&4	NFL Gameday	Raceworld		World Poker Tour Primer		Pac 10 Arizona @ Stanford			
EWTN	A Christian Pilgrimage To Jordan	Angelus (3:15 PM)	Suffering Church	Angel Force	Children's Rosary	The Holy Rosary With Mother Angelica and the Nuns Of Our Lady Of Angels Monastery	The Spirit Of Catholic Leadership	Saints: A Closer Look	EWTN Gallery	EWTN Live With Father Mitch Pacwa		Pope John Paul's Legacy To The Family	Council Of Faith	Daily Mass		Angelus (10:15PM)	Holy Spirit In The Church	The Journey Home	

TV SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.



WINNERS ALL: Russia's Elena Dementieva gracefully plays a backhand on the way to beating Eleni Daniilidou, 6-3, 3-6, 6-2, at the Sydney International tournament. At the Kooyong classic, World No. 1 Roger Federer defeated Gaston Gaudio, 5-7, 6-1, 6-4. REUTERS

AUSSIE TILTS

Big guns advance

MELBOURNE, Australia—Roger Federer closed with an ace and then a rifling forehand Wednesday, starting his fine-tuning for an Australian Open title defense with a 5-7, 6-1, 6-4 win over Gaston Gaudio at the Kooyong Classic exhibition tournament.

Andre Agassi unveiled a sleeker physique in his 6-1, 7-6 (4) win over Olympic gold medalist Nicolas Massu and next faces No. 2-ranked Andy Roddick, who breezed to a 6-1, 6-4 win over Croatia's Ivan Ljubicic.

Agassi and Roddick will meet Thursday in the eight-man promotion-relegation format, while Federer next plays Tim Henman, who beat Argentina's David Nalbandian, 6-1, 7-5.

In Sydney, Lleyton Hewitt defeated France's Arnaud Clement, 6-2, 6-4, Wednesday, and advanced to the Medibank Sydney International quarterfinals. The 23-year-old Australian won his fifth consecutive game to seal the match and advance against 2002 Australian Open champion Thomas Johansson, who beat Wayne Arthurs, 7-6 (4), 7-6 (3), Wednesday.

In women's second-round play, third-seeded Elena Dementieva beat Eleni Deniilidou, 6-3, 3-6, 6-2. Nadia Petrova of Russia defeated Daniela Hantuchova, 6-0, 6-2, and Samantha Stosur of Australia, a finalist in last week's Gold Coast tournament, beat Tatiana Golovin of France, 6-2, 4-6, 6-2. *AP*

West's best tames beast of the east

PHOENIX—Amare Stoudemire scored 34 points Tuesday as the Phoenix Suns won their seventh straight, and 18th in 19 games, 122-107, over the Miami Heat in a matchup of the teams with the best record in the West and East.

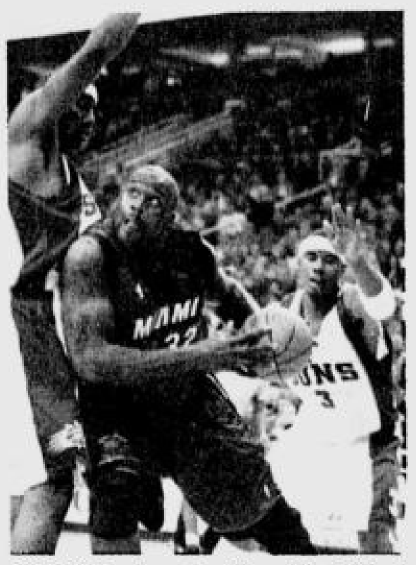
All five Suns starters hit double figures—in the first half—and Phoenix improved its NBA-best record to 31-4, the sixth-best start for a team with four losses in league history. Four of the five ahead of them went on to win the NBA title.

"I did a little bit of everything," Stoudemire said. "I tried to mix it up on [Shaquille O'Neal], and use my jumper. I figured he was going to back up a little bit and let me shoot, and when he came out, I took it to the rack and tried to get fouls or make plays for my teammates."

Shawn Marion added 26 points and 11 rebounds, Steve Nash 16 points and 16 assists and Joe Johnson 24 points and nine rebounds for the Suns, who topped 120 points for the second game in a row and seventh time this season.

"I don't know that I've seen a quicker team in my 10 years in the league," Miami coach Stan Van Gundy said. "They've got great athletes at every position."

O'Neal had 34 points and 11 rebounds, but the Heat—beaten at Seattle on Sunday—lost two in a row for only the second time this season.



MIAMI Heat center Shaquille O'Neal gets doubled by Phoenix Suns forward Amare Stoudemire (left) and Quentin Richardson (right). AP

In East Rutherford, New Jersey, Rasheed Wallace had 19 points and 13 rebounds for Detroit, and New Jersey lost in its first game since learning injured star Richard Jefferson will miss the rest of the regular season, 89-80.

Jefferson, dressed in all black, watched from the bench as the Nets got 19 points from Vince Carter, 16 from Travis Best and 13 from Jason Kidd while losing for the fourth time in five games.

In Cleveland, LeBron James scored 29 points and helped Cleveland rally from a 10-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat Charlotte, 100-98, for its fifth straight victory.

Brevin Knight tied a career high with 20 assists for the Bobcats, who lost for the eighth time in nine games. Gerald Wallace and Primoz Brezec led Charlotte with 18 points apiece.

In New York, Baron Davis had 21 points and 10 assists to give the New Orleans an 88-82 victory over New York and its first winning streak of the season.

In Atlanta, Tyronn Lue scored a season-high 18 points to lead seven Atlanta players in double figures as the Hawks beat Milwaukee, 103-80, and snapped a six-game losing streak.

In Memphis, Tennessee, Jermaine O'Neal capped a 35-point night by making two freethrows with 4.6 seconds left to help Indiana snap Memphis' six-game winning streak with an 86-85 triumph.

O'Neal, who was 12-of-23 from the field, grabbed 12 rebounds.

Pau Gasol had 31 points and four blocks for Memphis, and recorded the 5,000th point and 500th block of his career in just 275 games: Only nine players have reached the milestones faster.

In Sacramento, California, Peja Stojakovic scored 27 points, Mike Bibby added 18 and the short-handed Kings extended Denver's losing streak in Sacramento to 17 games with a 109-100 victory.

In Seattle, Ray Allen scored 31 points and Vladimir Radmanovic had nine of his 18 points in the fourth quarter, helping Seattle deal Los Angeles its second straight loss, 104-99. *AP*

SPORTSWATCH

PBA hits the malls anew

THE EVER-GOTESCO chain of malls, in cooperation with the PBA, will treat local basketball fans and enthusiasts to a seven-weeklong fair of fun and games where they would be given a rare chance to meet and greet their favorite players and teams outside of the playing venue. Dubbed "PBA Timeout@Ever Malls," the event kicks off on Jan. 15 with 10 of the top pro stars expected to grace the grand launch at Ever Grand Central. The Coca-Cola Tigers and the FedEx Express will be at Ever Grand Central on Jan. 20 and 22, respectively, with the Alaska Aces holding a team marketing day on Jan. 29. The mall-hopping tour, sponsored by Ever malls and backed by Gilette, FedEx, Air 21, Mail and More, Hanford, Accel and JVC, will then visit Ever Commonwealh on Feb. 1-15 with the Talk 'N Text Phone Pals gracing the event on Feb. 3, the San Miguel Beermen on Feb. 5, and the Shell Turbochargers on Feb. 10.

Yulo golf eyes record field

WITH 82 teams already listed, the 27th Jose Yulo Memorial golf tournament hopes to draw a record field when it is staged Jan. 29-30 at the north and south courses of the Canlubang golf complex. More teams are expected to register before the Jan. 27 deadline. Joaquin Tan and guest partner Manuel Tinio are back to defend the crown they won last year but they are expected to have their hands full against a field that includes the country's top amateur, Juvic Pagunsan, and club bets Boyet Saragoza and Abe Rosal. Registration is ongoing. For details, call Fely Anillo at (049) 540-1363(tel/fax), Darly Patalot and Naty Esteban at (049) 549-7201, (049) 549-0147 to 48 or at the Makati Office c/o Maite Tangoc at 897-6887 or 890-9321.

Drag race season-ender blasts off

THE BEST drag race enthusiasts will see action in the season-ender of the 2004 Petron Blaze Shootout National Drag Race Championship Series on Saturday, Jan. 15 at Spur Road inside Clark Special Economic Zone in Pampanga. After six rounds, Joey Galang, Dondi Montecillo, Nelson Pamintuan and Audel Sison will have to battle it out in the final race of the year to know who gets to win the title. The 2004 Petron Blaze Shootout National Drag Race Championship Series is sponsored by Petron Blaze and Ultron in cooperation with Roadwise Motoring School, motorista.com.ph, pinoydragracing.com, 103.5 K-Lite FM and Ambi Pur. For inquiries, call or text 09163121050.

NCA championship, int'l derby slated

ELECTRIFYING cockfight action resumes today at the fully air-conditioned Araneta Coliseum as the National Cockers Assocation (NCA) 7-Cock Derby championship round starts at 5 p.m. The powerhouse team of former ambassador Danding Cojuangco and Gov. Ito Ynares dominated the eliminations Tuesday night after their two entries piled up six victories in as many fights. The bets of Roger Buenaflor and Gerry Ramos posted three wins each. Araneta Coliseum will be the focus of cockers' attention nationwide on Jan. 18, 20 and 22 as the crowd-drawing World Slasher Cup 8-Cock International Derby unfolds. The event features local champions against international derby stars from the USA, Mexico, Malaysia and Japan.

Roligon bash stakes P4 million, Pajero

A GUARANTEED cash prize of P4 million plus a brand new Pajero is at stake when the Roligon Mega Cockpit's 15th Anniversary 7-Cock Derby gets going from January 29 to February 9. Four separate 3-cock elimination rounds are set on January 29, 31; February 2 & 5 . Day champion prizes of P100,000 for each elimination event await the three-pointers. Those with two points or less in the preliminaries take on each other in the semifinals set on Feb. 7 with a day champion's prize of P500,000. The 4-cock championship takes center stage on Feb. 9. Thunderbird Power Feeds is the exclusive sponsor of the event.

SHANG CINEPLEX
① OCEAN'S TWELVE
FS 10.35AM, 1 15PM, 3.55PM 6.35PM, LMF 9:15PM
(PG-13)
② KUNG FU HUSTLE
FS 12 20PM, 2.45PM, 5.10PM 7.35PM, LMF 10.00PM
(PG-13)
③ BLADE TRINITY
FS 12 00PM, 2 30PM, 5 00PM, 7 30PM, LMF 10.00PM
(R 13)
④ RAISE YOUR VOICE
FS 10 30AM, 1.10PM, 3.50PM, 6 30PM, LMF 9:10PM
(GP)
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Shangri-La Plaza

PSA honors top . . .

From page A19

are Red Bull, Supermax, Pagcor, San Miguel Beer, Philippine Sports Commission, Accel and Manila Mayor Lito Atienza.

PSA president Jimmy Cantor of Malaya said those who failed to receive their invitations personally can get them at the reception area just before the program.

The complete list of awardees:

SPORTSWOMAN OF THE YEAR—Jennifer Rosales (golf)

SPORTSMAN OF THE YEAR—Manny Pacquiao (boxing)

SPECIAL AWARDS—Alex Pagulayan (billiards); Jasmine Figueroa (archery); Antoinette Rivero (taekwondo)

PRESIDENTIAL AWARD —Alvin Patrimonio (basketball)

MAJOR AWARDS—Mark Paragua (chess); Nelson Mariano III (chess); Liza del Rosario (bowling) Django Bustamante (billiards); Efren Bata Reyes (billiards); Rhyan Tanguilig (cycling); Gabriel Espinas (amateur basketball); Angelo Que (golf); Patti Dilema (horseracing)

TONY SIDDAYAO AWARD—Wesley So (chess)

LEADERSHIP AWARD—Celso Dayrit

HALL OF FAME—Mona Sulaiman (athletics); Lydia de Vega (athletics); Caloy Loyzaga (basketball); Lauro Mumar (basketball)

POSTHUMOUS—Boy Arazas (basketball); Agustin Cailao (swimming); Fely Fajardo (basketball); Purita Negal Jacinto (softball); Faustino Ardina (baseball); Boy Mendez (PSA); Ernie Singson (PSA); Teddy Alfarero (basketball); Rudy Samson (golf); Freddie Deen (darts); Domingo Itchon (basketball)

CITATIONS—Randy Sulco(boxing); Gaby dela Merced (karting); Chot Reyes (basketball); Matteo Guidicelli (karting); Don Bosco (sports program); Michelle Bumgarner (karting); Glenn Aguilar (motocross); AR Ramos (golf); Anjou Jellicoe Mauricio (X-Games); Yolanda Mendigoria (powerlifting); Juvic Pagunsan (golf); Enrique Rafael Rosales (powerlifting); BEST Center; Henry Dagmil (athletics); Tagaytay City; Marichi Gandionco (swimming); Kenneth San Andres (motorcross) Miguel Tabuena (golf); JR Gonzales (golf); Totoy Tingzon (baseball); Hermie Esguerra (horseracing); Alo Badolato (basketball); Jayvie Agojo (golf); Dottie Ardina (golf); Rene Catalan (wushu); Roy Vence (athletics); RP archery team; Arvin Ting (wushu); Tyson Sy (AF3); Solar Sports; Rudy Salud (boxing).

MOST PRODUCTIVE NSAs—Taekwondo, badminton.

RTU dominates college games

THE RIZAL Technological University Technocats dominated the first day of the athletic events by bagging eleven golds, six silvers and six bronzes in the 17th SCUAA-NCAR Games yesterday at Rizal Memorial Sports Complex.

Ranillo Jarabejo collected three golds to lead RTU's charge. Jarabejo conquered his first gold at the high jump competition by registering 1.68 m on his last jump leaving teammate Loudemar Deniego behind with 1.65 m. After just three hours, Ranillo registered his second gold in the long jump.

He also helped the Boni-based runners to victory in the 4 x 100 meter relay for his third gold.

RTU-Pasig student regent Valerie Anne Cruz of RTU Pasig Campus who hauled two golds by outpowering opponents in shot put and discus throw.

Jenalyn Fule added to the Technocrats romp with two golds and a silver. Fule's silver came after losing to schoolmate Ronalyn Mendoza in the 800-m run final.

The Technocrats collected golds in the 110-m men's hurdles, 800-m women's run, men's high jump, men's 4 x 100 m relay and the women's 3,000 m run.

"We really need this performances to achieve our dreams, to rule this SCUAA Games and be the overall champion this year," said RTU president Dr. Jose Macaballug.

Arigo hopes to make RP final roster

JOHN Arigo's dream of representing the country has taken a huge first step when he was selected as part of the initial 40-man pool from which national coach Chot Reyes will cull the national team.

Now, he wants to go out and prove something.

"Some are saying I'm a shoo-in because I play under coach Chot (with Coca Cola)," Arigo said. "But I don't want to be too confident because I know the competition is tight."

"I will play harder than usual because it is the only way to prove I'm a worthy contender," Arigo, 26, said.

The five-year pro spent his first four seasons with Alaska Milk after being drafted fourth overall in 2001, before getting traded tc Coca-Cola this year.

Arigo's size and shooting ability make it easy for him to create his own shots, unlike smaller guards who must find themselves open or come off screens to be able to score.

Arigo, a two-time Mythical Selection and All-Star member, was a part of the 2003 Alaska team that bagged the Invitational conference title.

He almost made it to one of two National pool squads that played in the PBA in 2003 but Alaska pulled him out because of the team's manpower problems then.

The movie in my mind

SPECTATOR

Al S. Mendoza

THE NEXT thing we hear, Manny Pacquiao will fight Mike Tyson.

Or, if that gets kaput, Pacquiao could be up against Vitaly Klitchsko.

Now, if neither of the two materializes and we next read in the papers that Muhammad Ali will come out of retirement to fight The Pacman, you better believe it.

To the holdouts, to the still unbelieving legion out there, there's nothing impossible in boxing. In this sport, everything's possible.

Roberto Duran versus Sugar Ray Leonard.

Tommy "The Hitman" Hearns versus Marvelous Marvin Hagler.

Ali-Frazier IV.

Name it, you got it.

Even a Holyfield-Foreman bout could be in the works.

Or a Holmes-Bonavena tiff.

Emile Griffith could even be resurrected, to be pitted against Oscar Dela Hoya and that'd still be fine.

Whether it's the Fifties or the Seventies, the Nineties or the 2000s, everything's the same. Nothing's changed. Boxing will remain the red light district of sports. Forever.

Manny Pacquiao's odyssey began with a reported rematch with Juan Manuel Marquez. That was changed to a Pacquiao-Barrera rematch. Then Pacquiao versus an African, whose tongue twister of a name escapes my mind for now.

What we saw instead was a Pacquiao getting himself pitted against a human battery from Thailand, who was hugely touted as a ferocious knockout artist but who turned out to be a dud. But of course. In four rounds, the Thai lay pitifully on the floor, not knowing where he was, what hit him.

Since he knocked out Ledwaba, the African world champion some years back, Pacquiao would henceforth fight no one but a world-class fighter. If you can't believe that, you won't also believe the lie peddled ages ago that, at one stage, the world was flat.

It is said that a sucker is born every minute.

In boxing, almost everybody outside the sport's inner circle, is a sucker.

So, if Tyson is revived for another fight, crowds would still come to watch him. Never mind that he's made a fool of himself in his last three fights. Boxing buffs are the most gullible; they believe everything. Like lovers blinded by emotion more than reason, they always bet with their hearts more than their wallets.

So, all right, we are told that Pacquiao will no longer fight Marquez, the "Mexican Matador" he had floored three times in the first round last May before receiving the shock of his life: a split draw after 12 rounds.

In "Matador's" place would be Erik Morales, the "El Terrible" of Mexico.

The reason given was Marquez wanted $1.5 million, refusing the $750,000 offered him to fight Pacquiao on Feb. 26.

Whether true or not, what we are being told now is a Pacquiao-Morales fight, reportedly in March. How that came about, stand by for further developments. Already, we hear Pacquiao say that Morales is his "dream fight."

Nice start to hype the fight—if ever it happens.

As I said, there's nothing definite in boxing. A fight is not even on even when two boxers are already atop the ring ready to answer the first bell.

With the third man not in the ring—the referee, dummy—what we have is a movie, not a fight. Starring Chaplin, if not Dolphy.

***

FASTBREAK. The world-class Power Bowl at Rockwell in Makati has a new high performance, lane-conditioning machine that ensures a high level scoring prospect not only for advanced bowlers but for beginners, as well. Called the "Elite" by Kegel, the machine is worth P1.2 million. My salute to Power Bowl, given the "Outstanding Bowling Center Award" by the National Consumer Affairs Foundation the past two years. Also, the one thing that draws kids to Power Bowl is the anti-gutter fence especially provided for the "little ones" just starting to play the game. Only at Rockwell.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Reenactment in lieu of cameras for Jacko trial

LOS ANGELES—An American and a British television company found a creative way around the ban on cameras for Michael Jackson's child-molestation trial: dramatic reenactment.

E! Entertainment Television and satellite company British Sky Broadcasting, BSkyB, are joining to present daily recreations of the trial, executives announced Tuesday.

Given international interest in the pop star's case and the lack of cameras, the series will "bring the trial to life," said Ted Harbert, president and chief executive officer of E! Networks.

The partnership calls for five daily half-hour programs to air during the course of the trial, scheduled to start Jan. 31.

Court transcripts will be used to highlight the previous day's testimony and court events, with each network packaging the recreations with its own hosts. The versions will be produced by E! News and, in Britain, Sky News.

On E!, the series also will include commentary by legal analysts. A Saturday wrap-up show is planned.

The series also will air on E! International Network, seen in more than 50 countries.

Jackson, 46, has pleaded not guilty to charges of molesting a boy, conspiracy and administering an intoxicating agent, alcohol, to his alleged victim. *AP*

A talented young…

From page A26

came easy for her because we were doing the movie in Visayan. In a way, hers is the kind of talent that we need in order to compete abroad."

She sells seashells

When she's not making movies, Lusterio lives by the sea with her mother Helen and four siblings. Her father Verano supports the family with fish caught from the sea. To help the family survive, she sells sea shells and souvenir items to local and foreign tourists after school and during weekends.

"My quiet life by the sea has not changed despite all these awards," she said. "I have no illusions of making it big in show biz this early. I just want to finish my studies. I want to take up Masscom and get a job right away so I can help my family."

Indeed, on a typical evening, Lusterio and her brother would be buying basic grocery items or half a gallon of gasoline for their fisherman father preparing to go to the sea.

"She lives a simple and idyllic life, away from the lure of easy money," Montano observed. "Everything that she has, she earned through hard work. *Pag nahalo yan sa mga taong hindi totoo* [Once she is exposed to unreal people], that's where the danger begins."

The actor-turned-director has high hopes for the young actress: "She has to be taken care of by a talent scout with the right orientation, someone with a vision."

Lusterio has been asked, time and again, how a person as young as herself, managed to be such a good actress?

"*Hindi ko po alam* [I don't know]," she would say.

Now that's an honest answer from a real person.

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1	THX OCEAN'S 12	KUNG FU HUSTLE	KUNG FU HUSTLE	GUARANTEED SEATS THX KUNG FU HUSTLE 12 45, 2 50, 4 55, 7 00, 9 05, 11 10	OCEAN'S 12
2	BLADE: TRINITY	OCEAN'S 12	RAISE YOUR VOICE	GUARANTEED SEATS THX OCEAN'S 12 2 00, 4 30	BLADE: TRINITY
3	KUNG FU HUSTLE	BLADE: TRINITY	GUARANTEED SEATS THX OCEAN'S 12	GUARANTEED SEATS IN SEARCH OF AN IMPOTENT MAN 1 05, 3 10, 5 15, 7 20, 9 25, 11 30	ONE MISSED CALL
4	IN SEARCH OF AN IMPOTENT MAN	RAISE YOUR VOICE	IN SEARCH OF AN IMPOTENT MAN	GUARANTEED SEATS RAISE YOUR VOICE 2 00, 4 20, 6 40, 9 00, 11.20	2046
5	RAISE YOUR VOICE		ENTENG KABISOTE	GUARANTEED SEATS BLADE: TRINITY 2 50, 5 00, 7 10, 9 20, 11 30	
6			BLADE: TRINITY		
7			HAPPY TOGETHER		

GB1
GREENBELT 1

	GB1
1	KUNG FU HUSTLE 11 20, 1 25, 3 30, 5 35, 7.40, 9:45
2	OCEAN'S 12 11 00, 1 10, 3 40, 6 10, 8 40

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Sun shines through for Mrs. Montano

DOLLY WOOD

Dolly Ann Carvajal

THE STORM is over in the marriage of **Cesar Montano** and **Sunshine Cruz.**

Just like her name, Sunshine tries to keep the light glowing amid whatever marital troubles they have. For Buboy's part, he knows how to go with the flow of show biz intrigues the way his character in "Panaghoy Sa Suba" is one with the river.

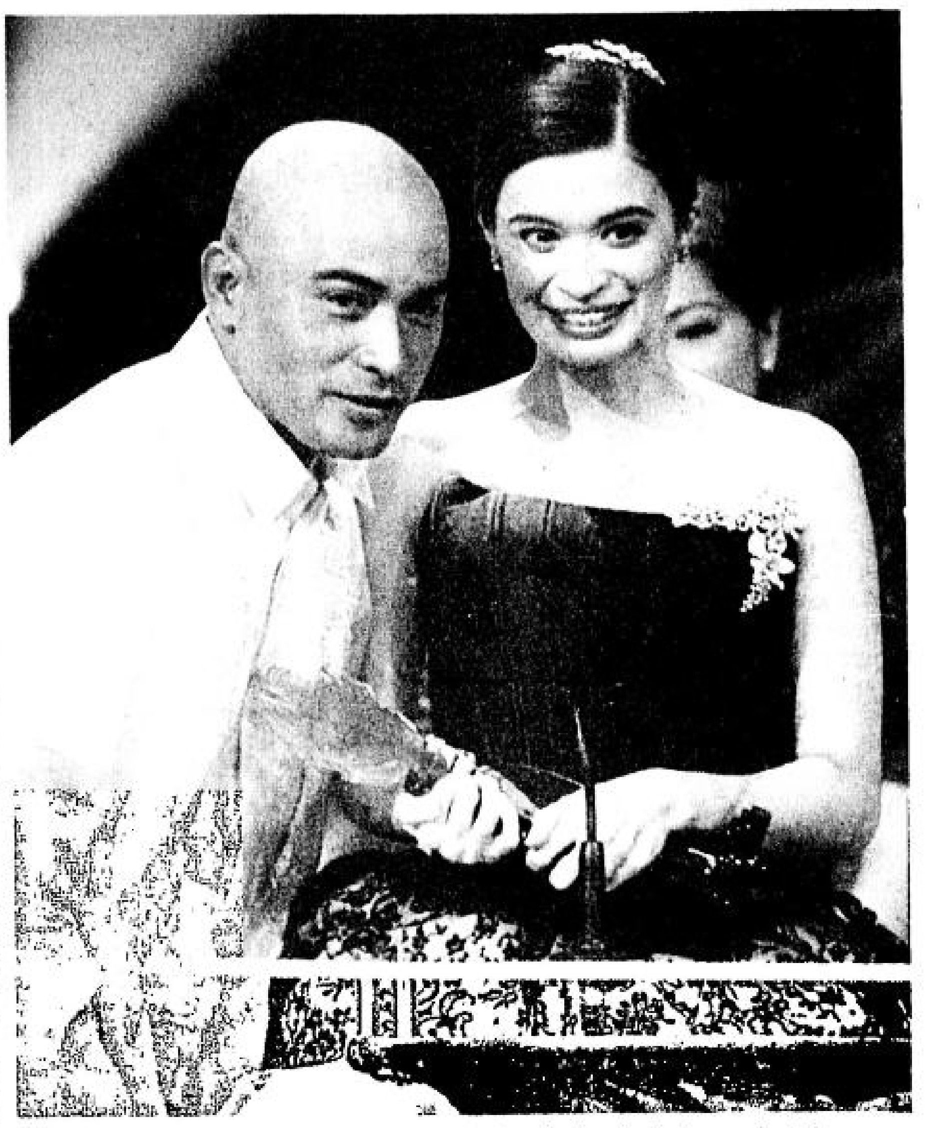
Shine reveals: "Buboy and I love each other. Trials make our love stronger. Everyday he makes me *suyo* and takes me with him wherever he goes. He makes sure I'm always happy ."

If it's any consolation, their spats are caused by external and not internal factors. That way, it's more manageable. Besides, fights serve as a renewal of love if it's deep and true.

"I don't want to dwell on the issue about Buboy and **Juliana (Palermo)** anymore," Sunshine says. "I refuse to torture myself wondering if something really happened between them during the shooting of 'Panaghoy.' *Tapos na 'yun. Nagkausap na kami ni* Juliana. Too bad *di kami nagkaintindihan. Ayoko na sana mag*-react but I got hurt by the nasty things she wrote about me in her magazine column and what she said on TV. As Buboy's wife, it's only natural that I get offended, but this will all pass. Buboy's constant reassurance is more than enough."

Any final words for Juliana? Shine takes a deep breath: "She's [also] in show biz so she should know *na dito, ang pikon talo*. Bayani cracked a joke *sa* sitcom *nila ni* Buboy about something that happened *daw* between my husband and her. Why does she have to be so defensive? "

.Right now the couple is taking a break in Buboy's hometown, Bohol (where "Panaghoy" was shot). Nope, Bohol won't bring back memories of shooting with Juliana. Buboy and Shine are too busy being happy to be bothered by that anymore. The "Sunshine" in Mrs. Cesar Montano would rather warm their home with more love, than burn in show biz intrigues.



CESAR was the perfect escort to his wife during the last festival awards night.

Kabayan's devotion

I THOROUGHLY enjoyed listening to **Katkat de Castro** tell me about her dad's (Vice President Noli) longtime devotion to the Black Nazarene. It restored my faith as well.

She rambled on like any proud daughter would: "Way back during my dad's college days at the UE [University of the East], he lived in Quiapo and that's when he started being a Black Nazarene devotee. He prayed that even if his family was poor, he would finish his studies. When he was making decisions as to what career path to take, he sought for guidance also from the Black Nazarene. Imagine he took up banking and finance but he ended up in broadcasting? He accompanied his *kuya* to a radio audition but he was the one who got the job. God's will *talaga*! To this day, when anybody in the family is sick or has problems, he turns to the Black Nazarene & everything becomes okay."

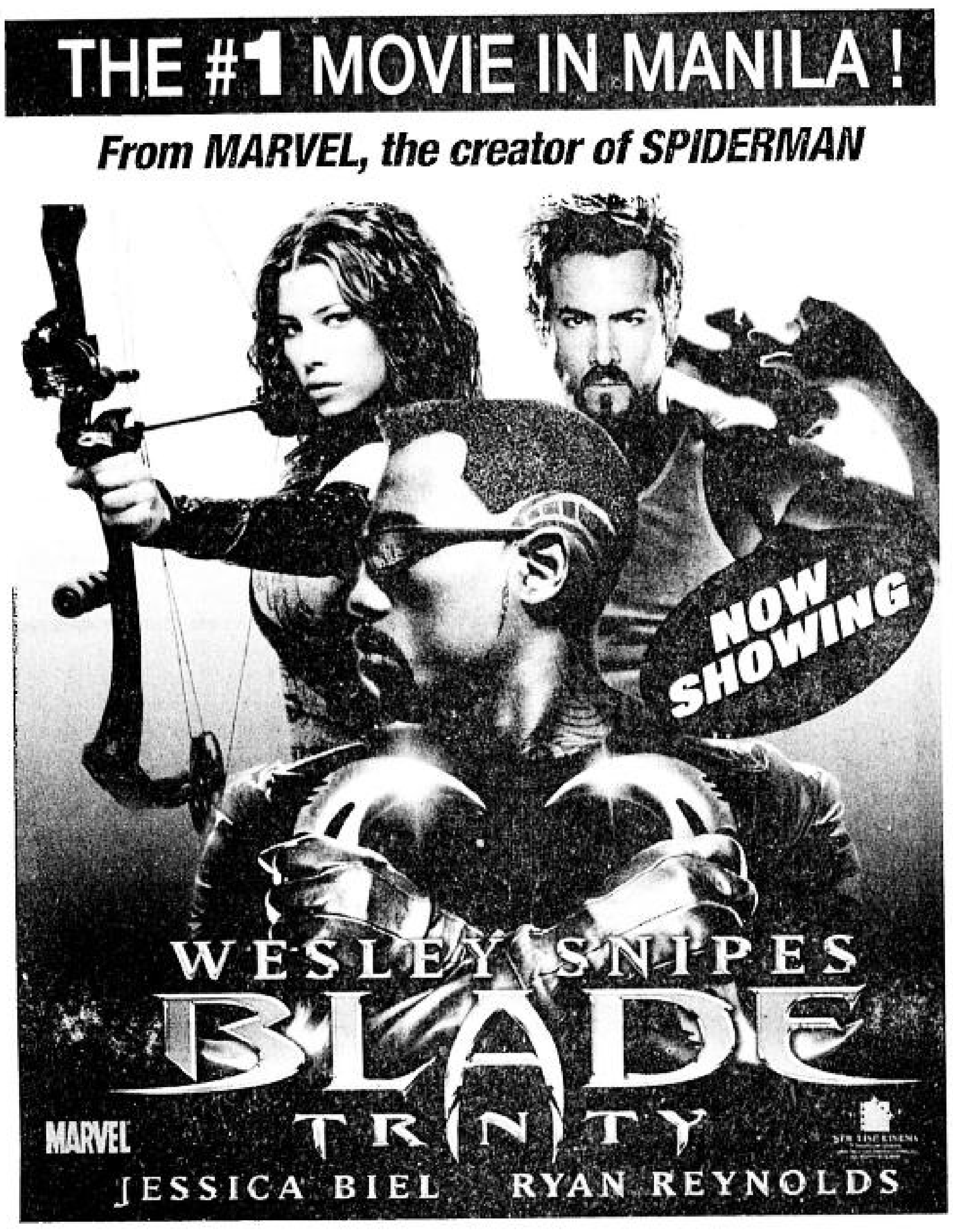
Even if all of Kabayan's prayers have been answered, he has not lost sight of his link with the Black Nazarene. It's good to know that a leader like him can be a follower too.

VJ material?

TWO decades ago, MTV introduced a term that soon became a staple in everyone's vocabulary: VJ or Video Jock. From the moment they first appeared on TV screens, the MTV VJs instantly became pop culture icons. Shortly after, other television networks started labeling their hosts as VJs. Video jocks, apart from being regular show hosts, were expected to be iconic characters on-screen, with larger-than-life personas. They were trendsetters with hip, cool, and irreverent personalities—characteristics that could only be attributed to the coolest TV channel that started it all: MTV.

If you think you have what it takes to be an MTV VJ, unleash your standout personality when MTV Philippines visits the following venues on these dates: January 13, SM City Cebu; January 16, SM Megamall; January 21, SM City Pampanga; and January 23, SM City Davao. Be there early to register and grab an audition spot— gates open at 10 am. For more information call the MTV office at 889-9251 or tune in to MTV Philippines.

For feedback, e-mail wateringhole-shangrila@yahoo.com or dollyanne@truefaithband.com.



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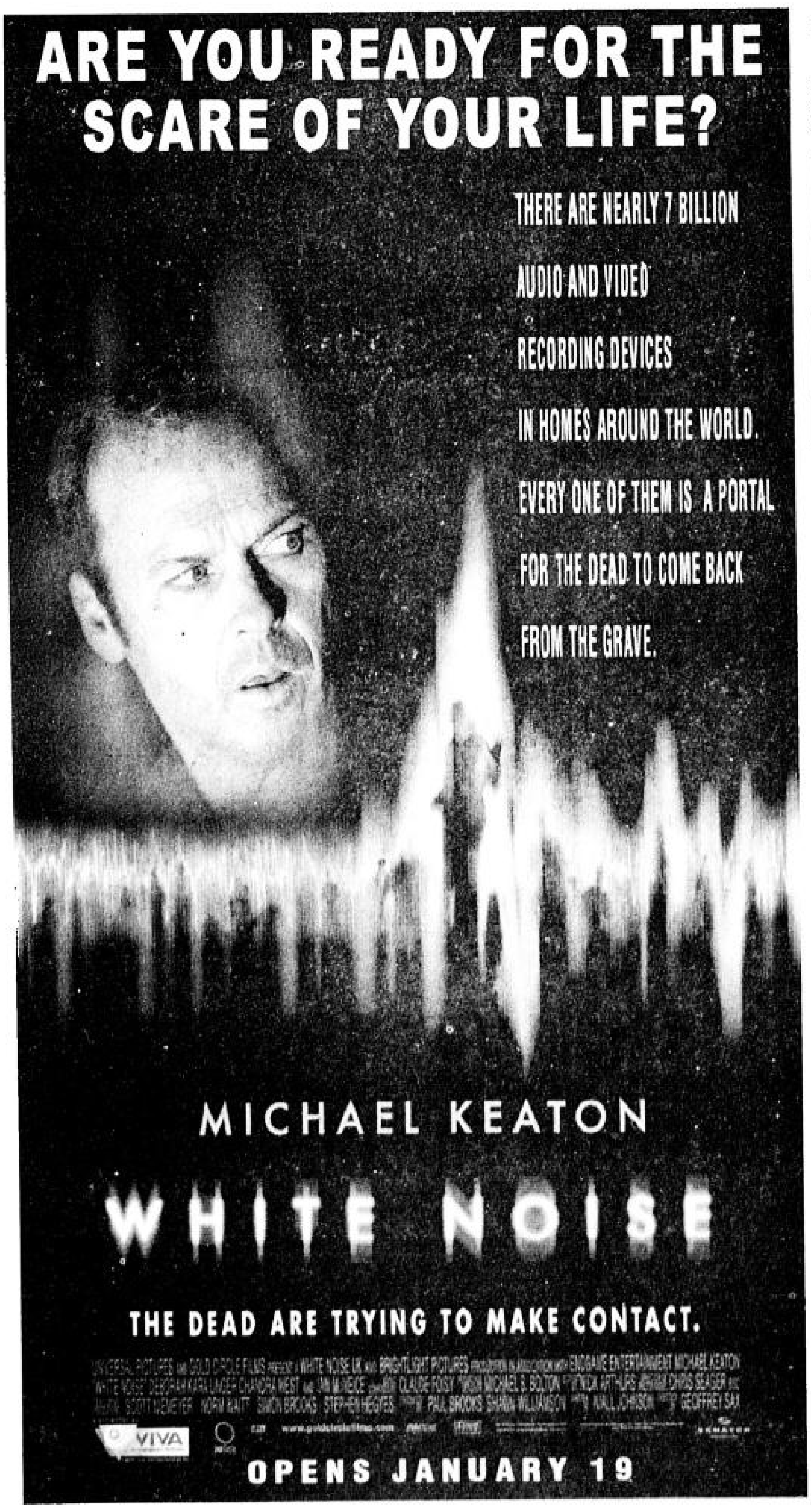

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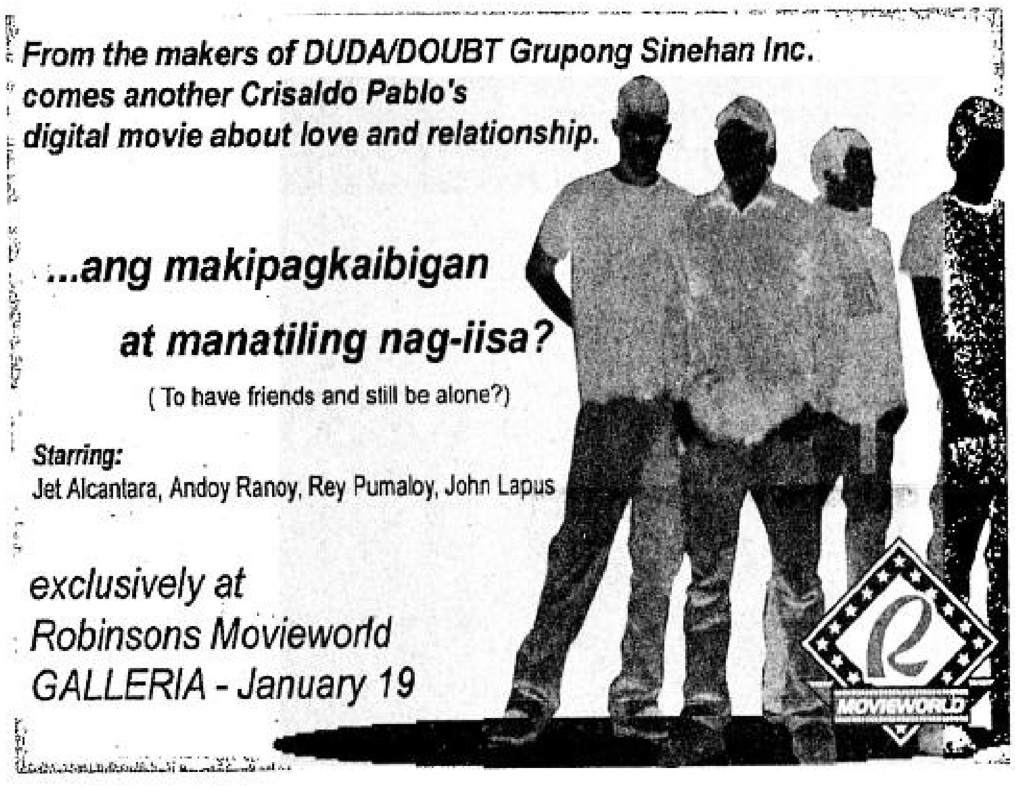

From the makers of DUDA/DOUBT Grupong Sinehan Inc. comes another Crisaldo Pablo's digital movie about love and relationship.
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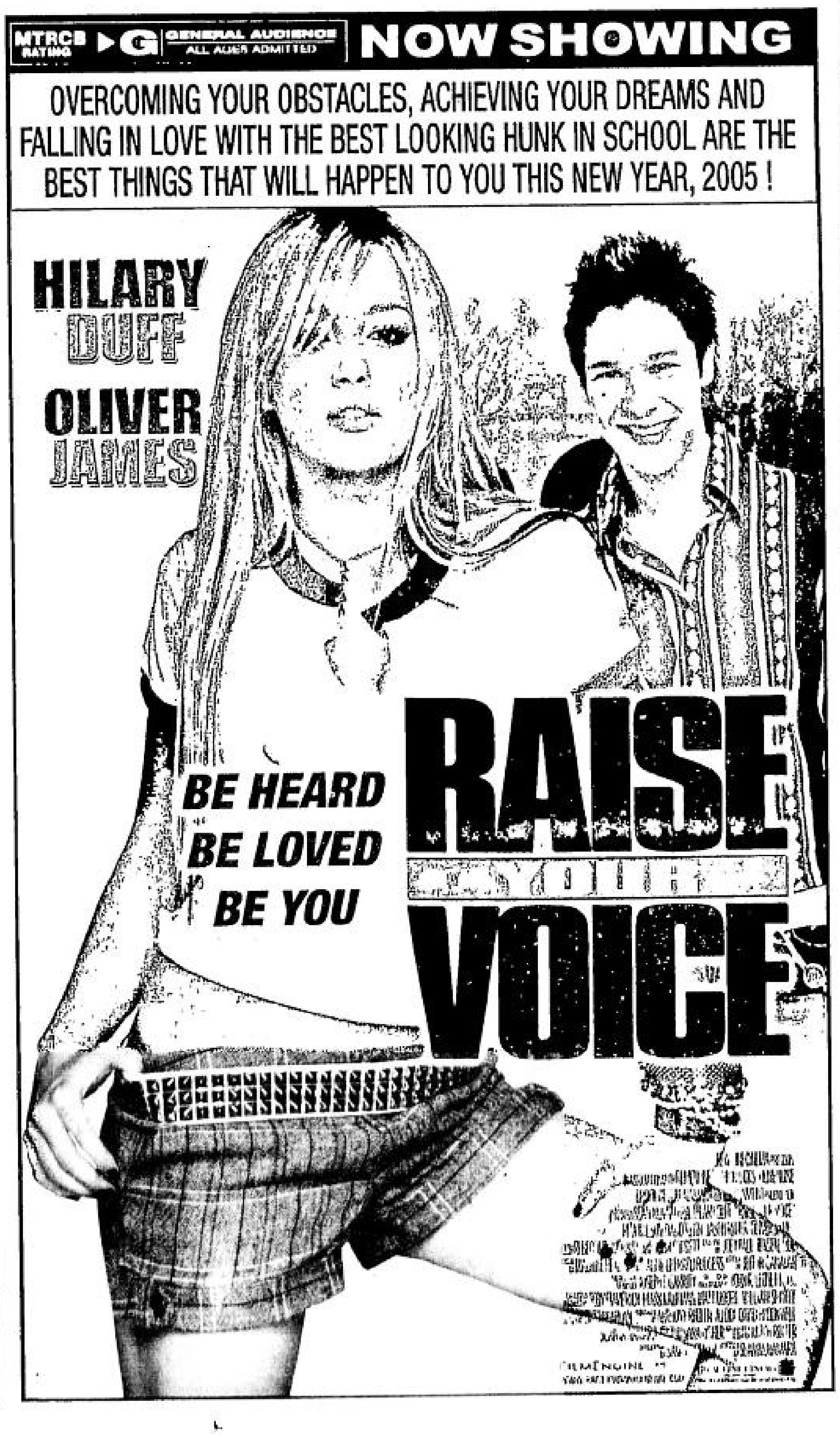

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All eyes on 'Uno'

THE FILIPINO action film has been practically an extinct movie species for the past couple of years. But 2005 may see the resurgence of the once popular film type, with the screening this month of **Ronnie Ricketts'** new actioner, "Uno."

"Rocketts" co-stars in the film with another action star, **Monsour del Rosario**. The production has a distinct preference for the martial arts mode, but other fighting styles will also be featured.

We hope that the movie does well at the tills, so other producers will be encouraged to bankroll their own action-drama or action-comedy projects.

It's likely, however, that the new action movies will be markedly different from the big productions of the '80s and '90s. Those productions' huge budgets made it difficult for their producers to recoup their investment, and this helped account for the eventual decline of local action movies.

Thus, most of the veteran action superstars who have gone jobless for the past few years may not be able to make a comeback this year. The new actioners will probably take their cue from "Uno," and be less expensive projects starring our younger action leads like Ronnie and Monsour.

A possible exception could be **Bong Revilla**, who is reported to be co-producing a movie with **Kris Aquino**, intended for the 2005 Metro Manila Film Festival.

Robin Padilla also has a new movie (line-produced by **Sharon Cuneta**, incidentally), but it isn't an action production.

Other action stars have already been paid to star in new productions, but their producers aren't picking up their options because they're leery of those stars' chances at the box office at this time. If "Uno" makes it they *could* change their minds.

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

So, "Uno" may be a relatively budget production, but a lot could be riding on its performance at the box office, which other producers could use as a barometer of their own new action films' chances at the tills.

Annabelle approves

RICHARD Gutierrez and **Angel Locsin**, the young stars of Channel 7's popular *fantaserye*, "Mulawin," are parlaying their constant exposure on TV into joint film stardom.

After co-starring in the Metro filmfest chiller, "Sigaw," they're going the romantic route in "Let the Love Begin."

Their new movie affirms their having established themselves as the big screen's newest love team. If it clicks with adolescent and teen viewers, they could make a couple more films along the same lines this year.

Since only a few Filipino movies are being made these days, the renewed production activity resulting from new love teams would be most welcome. Aside from Richard-Angel, other romantic tandems with new films coming up are **Bea Alonzo-Piolo Pascual** and **Sandara Parks-Hero Angeles**.

For a time there, however, the Richard-Angel love team was threatened by speculations that Richard's mom, **Annabelle Rama**, disapproved of Angel.

But Annabelle recently belied that notion, pointing out that, if she had indeed nixed Angel, the young actress would never have gotten to co-star with her son in the first place. So, the mere fact that Richard and Angel have already done some projects together means that Angel is A-OK with Annabelle for her son—as long as they aren't planning to settle down anytime soon! After all, with their solo and joint careers going so well, that wouldn't be the "practical" thing to do.

Movies on TV

ON HBO, Jan. 13 at 4 p.m., "Laughter on the 23rd Floor"; 9 p.m., "What A Girl Wants"; 10:45 p.m., "The Adventures of Pluto Nash." Jan. 14 at 9:30 a.m., "Little Nikita"; 4:15 p.m., "She's Having A Baby"; 9 p.m., "Mission Impossible"; 10:50 p.m., "Primal Fear."

On Cinemax, Jan. 13 at 10:15 p.m., "Mrs. Winterbourne"; 7 p.m., "Charlotte Gray"; 10:50 p.m., "Mary Shelley's Frankenstein"; 1:55 a.m., Anzio." Jan. 14 at 7:15 p.m., "Changing Lanes."

Feedback

FROM JENNIFER Zuñiga of Calamba, Laguna: "I agree with the points you raised in your recent column, 'Excessive Stress on Crime and Gossip in TV Newscasts.' Many radio and TV shows disturb the development of people especially the youth.

"You are instrumental in helping our radio-TV people do their job professionally. Shows should not destroy the dignity of a person. We have to love others by respecting the gift of each other's God-given life, and truly care for one another by improving the quality of human life.

"I also agree that newscasts are supposed to inform viewers about the events and issues of the day, so that they can develop themselves into thinking and acting members of society. For the good of the country, newscasts should serve as good examples to young people in speaking, acting and being refined. Respecting the honor and good name of others is an essential way of loving our neighbor.

"My family supports your campaign for more responsible television programming."

Controversy halts big TV show for tsunami victims

LOS ANGELES—A television benefit show for victims of the Asian tsunami featuring Madonna, Stevie Wonder, Eric Clapton, Elton John and a string of Hollywood celebrities has run into controversy in the United States before a note has been played or a dollar pledged.

Fox TV conservative commentator Bill O'Reilly started the furor by suggesting that not all the money raised would aid tsunami victims.

Actor George Clooney, one of the organizers of the telethon scheduled for Saturday on NBC, hit back with a letter accusing O'Reilly of creating a fuss for his own personal gain.

"Because of it fewer people will donate money to help truly traumatized victims. They'll be afraid that their money will do no good," Clooney wrote.

He urged O'Reilly to take part as a presenter and followed up with a letter saying, "We're not playing games here, we're trying to save lives. It's as simple as this; you're either with this joint effort or against it."

Close watch

O'Reilly said before making a decision he wanted to know more about the format of the benefit and how donations would be distributed.

He said he would be "watching to see if the money gets to the tsunami victims" and warned that the celebrities taking part "had better be involved all the way down the line."

The show is due to be broadcast from studios in New York, Los Angeles and London, England, to raise money for the work of the American Red Cross in the tsunami and earthquake devastated Indian Ocean region.

The broadcast, originally scheduled for one hour, has been extended to two hours.

Performers will include Diana Ross, Sheryl Crow, Norah Jones, Annie Lennox and Brian Wilson. There will also be appearances by Actors Clint Eastwood, Halle Berry, Meg Ryan, Kevin Spacey and other stars.

"All the donations will go to support tsunami relief," said American Red Cross spokesman Darren Irby. He said the organization had raised about $160 million so far but expected it will need to spend around $400 million on the disaster.

A similar telecast carried by all four main US networks after the Sept. 11 2001 attacks raised more than $150 million. *AP*

Storms bog down Disneyland traffic

PHOENIX—Walt Disney Co.'s Disneyland theme park has seen a slowdown in traffic due to storms that have hit Southern California over the last week, Chief Operating Officer Bob Iger told Reuters on Tuesday.

"It has some impact," he said on the sidelines of an investor conference, when asked if the recent bad weather which has broken rainfall records was having a material impact on revenue. He declined to give details.

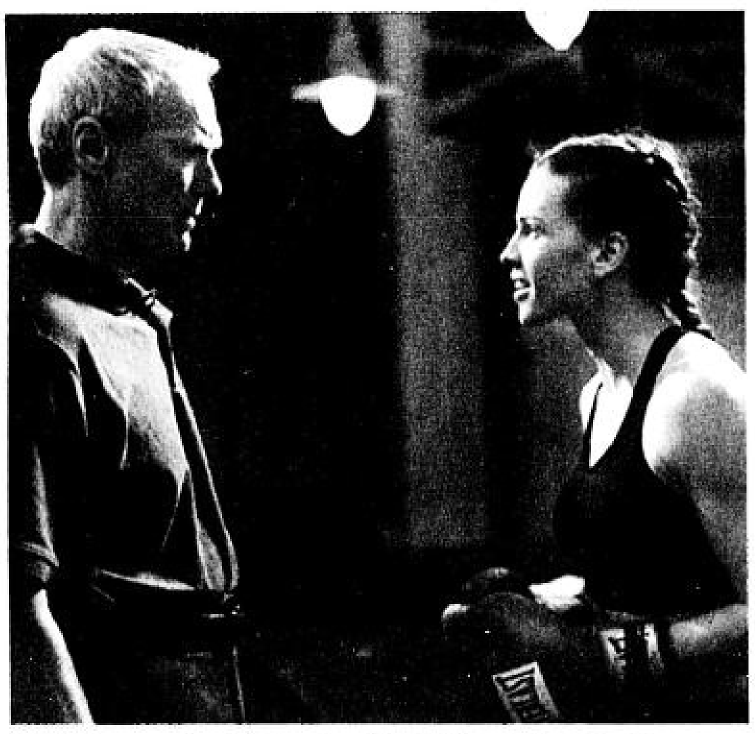
Iger also reiterated to the conference that Disney expected double-digit profit growth this year and improvement in all segments.

Disney has already signaled that the fiscal first quarter, which ended in December, faced tough comparisons with the year ago period, which was rich with blockbusters.

But he said that he expected ABC television to return to profit in the current fiscal year and improvement at theme parks, especially Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, which has instituted new pricing giving discounts for longer stays.

The company also in May plans to offer free shuttles from the Orlando airport to Disney hotels, including luggage transfer. That service would actually improve company revenue, he added.

"So they are provided with transportation, which is a good thing because we don't like people to rent cars, because if they don't rent cars, they stay on our property longer," Iger said. *Reuters*



CLINT Eastwood and Hilary Swank in "Million Dollar Baby"

American SAG tilts . . .

From page A26

Drake," Hilary Swank in "Million Dollar Baby," Annette Bening (comedy) in "Being Julia," Kate Winslet (romance) in "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind" and newcomer Catalina Sandino Moreno for her role as a cocaine smuggler in the drama "Maria Full of Grace."

That category sets up a rematch of 1999's best actress race in which Bening in "American Beauty" competed against Swank in "Boys Don't Cry." Bening won the SAG trophy, Swank an Oscar.

Supporting Actor nominees with Church and Foxx were Morgan Freeman for "Million Dollar Baby," child actor Freddie Highmore in "Neverland" and James Garner "The Notebook."

Garner will receive a lifetime achievement honor, marking the first time in the show's 11 years that an actor being given the achievement honor also has been nominated for an award.

Supporting Actress nominees with Madsen were Cate Blanchett playing Katharine Hepburn in "Aviator," Cloris Leachman in "Spanglish," Laura Linney in "Kinsey," about the life of sex researcher Alfred Kinsey, and Sophie Okonedo in "Rwanda."

SAG also gives out awards for television, and in that arena the casts of "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation," "24," "Six Feet Under," "The Sopranos" and "The West Wing," were nominated for Best Acting in a Drama.

The casts of "Arrested Development," new show "Desperate Housewives," "Everybody Loves Raymond," "Sex and the City," and "Will & Grace" were nominated for Best Acting in a TV Comedy.

Reuters

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A talented young actress who lives by the sea

REBECCA Lusterio's first movie role was as a girl who pretended to be a boy.

By Pablo A. Tariman
Contributor

The MMFF award is the fifth for Rebecca Lusterio, 15, but she is not about to let it disturb her quiet life selling seashells in Panglao Island, Bohol

IT WAS the third day of the New Year in Panglao Island, Bohol and 15-year-old Rebecca Lusterio was up early studying for her exams at nearby St. Augustine Academy where she is a third year high school student.

Bikay (as Rebecca is known to friends and relatives) had another taste of fame when the jury of last year's Metro Manila Film Festival named her Best Supporting Actress for her role in Cesar Montano's "Panaghoy sa Suba." She won over veteran actresses Jaclyn Jose, Caridad Sanchez and Angelu de Leon.

"This is actually my fifth award," Lusterio told the INQUIRER at nearby Alona Beach where she obliged us with a quick interview before her 1 p.m. exams. "I got four trophies from various awards bodies as Best Child Performer for the movie 'Muro Ami.' This is my first Best Supporting Actress award."

Lusterio, second child in a brood of five, didn't expect to win when she found out who the other contenders for the award were.

"I prayed just the same," she said.

The whole family watched the proceedings on TV in Bohol. Everyone "except my mother and I" fell asleep before the major acting awards were announced. When my name was called, we had to wake up everyone. *Nagulat ako pero siyempre, natuwa* [I was surprised but happy nevertheless]."

By show biz standards, the young awardee is a curious thing. When she won all those acting trophies for "Muro Ami" in the 1999 MMFF, she was just nine years old, yet she managed to pass herself off as a "boy" swimmer.

"It was Marilou Diaz-Abaya who discovered me," Lusterio said. "We used to lived in Balicasag, another island near Panglao. One day, a boat arrived and people announced auditions for 'Muro Ami.' My brother—who was then 15—decided to join so I tagged along with him."

DIREK Cesar on his precious "Bikay": She's focused, a good listener.

Both siblings went through three kinds of auditions: swimming, straight acting, and acting while in the water.

They both passed and had to undergo the standard acting workshop.

"I learned a lot from Direk Marilou (Diaz-Abaya)," she said. "*Magaling po siya at maintindihin* [she's very good and very thoughtful]."

Special delivery

Montano personally delivered Lusterio's trophy all the way to Panglao Island right after New Year. He recalled the first time he worked with the gifted child performer in "Muro Ami":

"She struck me right away as a nice kid and a natural actress," Montano said. "On the set, she was very fluid *at walang kanto kung umarte. Parang ang tagal nang umaarte* [a real natural, like she had been acting for a long time]. She also knew that she was working with a dream director in Direk Marilou, who encouraged her and gave her the right motivation."

After five years and all those awards, the director observed that although Lusterio remained *mabait, mahiyain* [kind-hearted, shy], she had matured as an artist.

"She's very focused. She's intelligent and a good listener. She understands instructions right away," Montano gushed. "For her role in 'Panaghoy,' I just gave her the script and told her we were supposed to be brother and sister. I suppose acting

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PAUL Giamatti and Thomas Haden Church in the acclaimed film

American SAG tilts toward 'Sideways'

LOS ANGELES—Low-budget road comedy "Sideways," about two men looking for love in California's wine country, led nominees for Screen Actors Guild Awards on Tuesday with four nominations, making it a frontrunner in the race for Oscars.

The other nominees for Best Film Cast, SAG's highest award, were Howard Hughes epic "The Aviator," African genocide drama "Hotel Rwanda," female boxing movie "Million Dollar Baby," "Finding Neverland," about how J.M. Barrie was inspired to write "Peter Pan," and "Ray," about soul singer Ray Charles.

The Screen Actors Guild Awards on Feb. 5 is a closely watched barometer for Oscars, the US film industry's top honors, because actors make up the largest voting group at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which gives out the Oscars. Academy Award winners will be named on Feb. 27.

Jamie Foxx, who played Charles, was nominated in four SAG categories including Best Actor. The number was more than any performer and the first time an actor has received that many SAG nominations. It should firm up his position as frontrunner for the Best Actor Oscar.

He was nominated for Best Supporting Actor for his performance as an abducted taxi driver in "Collateral" and Best Actor in a television movie as a convicted murderer in "Redemption." He was also in the Best Cast category for "Ray."

"Ray" director Taylor Hackford said Foxx was operating "at a very high level," but added he was proud of the Best Cast nomination because several actors with Foxx were relatively unknown to mass audiences and deserved recognition.

"It's one of the high points of my day," Hackford said. "I wanted this film to have real people, real faces. We got incredibly talented people, but also real performances."

7 nominations

"Sideways" earned Paul Giamatti and Thomas Haden Church nominations for Best Actor and Supporting Actor, respectively, and one for Virginia Madsen as Best Supporting Actress.

The low-budget movie has been named 2004's best movie by several critics' groups, and figures prominently at the upcoming Golden Globe Awards, where it is nominated for honors in seven categories, more than any other film.

Joining Giamatti and Foxx among Best Actor nominees were Don Cheadle as a heroic hotel manager in "Hotel Rwanda," Leonardo DiCaprio playing Howard Hughes in "Aviator" and Johnny Depp as Barrie in "Neverland."

Best Film Actress nominees were Britain's Imelda Staunton playing an abortionist in "Vera

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Peso rallies to 5-mo. high of 55.91:$1

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PESO yesterday rallied to a five-month high against the US dollar, appreciating to the 55:$1 level on a string of favorable local economic news and expectations of foreign investment inflow.

The local currency hit an intraday high of 55.85 before closing at 55.91 against the greenback, up from Tuesday's closing rate of 56.07. It was the peso's strongest closing rate since Aug. 24 last year.

Value turnover at the Philippine Dealing System stood at $337.5 million.

Local currency traders said the uptrend of most currencies in the region was spurred by the comment from the US Treasury that it would let market forces decide on the fate of the dollar, hinting that it would let the US currency weaken to make US exports more competitive in the global market.

Likewise cited as a beneficial factor was a comment from the European central bank urging the central banks in Asia to let their currencies strengthen to ease pressures on the euro.

Other currencies in the Southeast Asian region, such as the Thai baht and the Indonesian rupiah, likewise gained against the US dollar yesterday.

Aside from the weakening of the US dollar, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Rafael Buenaventura said the peso's rally was fueled by the stronger influx of portfolio and foreign direct investments into the country.

Banco de Oro Universal Bank chief strategist Jonathan Ravelas said that aside from global factors, the peso was now gaining ground on improved domestic economic outlook.

"There's a spate of good news. Exports are seen doing better than last year, the stock market is going up and the government is expected to keep its budget deficit this year below the ceiling," Ravelas said.

Finance Secretary Juanita Amatong earlier said the government might be able to speed up its fiscal consolidation and wipe out the budget deficit by 2008 or 2009, or earlier than the 2010 target.

The National Statistics Office also reported Tuesday that the country's export earnings rose by 19.5 percent to hit $3.69 billion in November, the highest growth rate in more than two years.

"In light of the weakening of the US dollar, we expect to see this (peso) level sustained in the coming months," Ravelas said, noting that the passage of key tax reform bills in Congress should further support the strengthening of the local currency.

Ravelas said he expected the peso to end at about 55.90 to the dollar in the first quarter of the year.

Tan submits best offer for Del Monte stake

TYCOON Lucio Tan is likely to buy Italian group Cirio's 40-percent stake in Del Monte Pacific after administrators of the bankrupt food group backed his bid, according to a Reuters dispatch yesterday quoting sources in Milan, Italy.

Cirio defaulted on more than 1 billion euros ($1.31 billion) of bonds in late 2002 and is being liquidated after investors rejected a restructuring plan. The three administrators are selling assets to raise cash to partly repay debt.

Tan and Manila-based food and drinks group San Miguel Corp. were the final bidders for the 40-percent stake in Del Monte Pacific, a Philippine firm listed in Singapore. The stake is worth $180 million at market prices.

"The administrators have considered Tan's bid to be the best," Reuters quoted one of its sources. "Now the (Industry) ministry is to approve (the deal)." Reuters said its sources did not give details of Tan's bid and the administrators declined to comment on the matter.

The ministry is expected to decide on the sale by the end of this week, it added.

Tan, one of the richest people in the Philippines and the region, owns stakes in Philippine Airlines, Asia Brewery, Fortune Tobacco, Philippine National Bank and Allied Bank. Forbes Magazine said the tobacco and beer ty-

TAN/ B2

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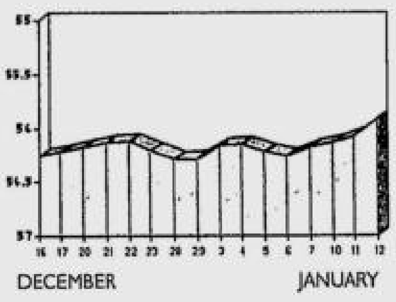

₱ 55.91 = $ 1

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STOCK MARKET

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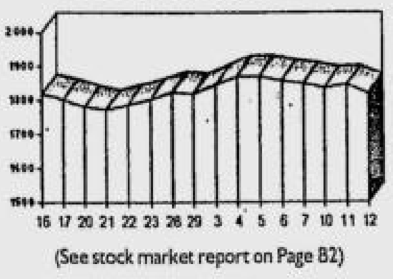

(See stock market report on Page B2)

Shares close 1.37% lower on security concerns

SHARE prices closed 1.37 percent lower yesterday as investors sold down major stocks following Wall Street's losses overnight and amid renewed security concerns, dealers said.

They said the sharp fall of Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co.'s (PLDT) American Depositary Receipts (ADR) listed in New York also weighed heavily on investor sentiment.

The Philippine Stock Exchange composite index fell 25.26 points at 1,820.57 after trading between 1,811.04 and 1,845.83.

Volume totalled 1.77 billion shares worth P1.23 billion from 3.05 billion shares worth P964.1 million on Tuesday.

The broader all-shares index fell 6.73 points to 1,166.61.

Losers beat gainers 46 to 18, with 58 stocks unchanged. AFP

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Money is called, phew is chosen

BREAKTIME

Conrado R. Banal III

AS EVERY clerk in every credit rating outfit in the world knows, this cute administration of Gloriaetta is, at the moment, a bit hard up on cash. It is only P200 billion short, okay!

No wonder then that the 11 million jobless among us—and still counting, mind you—jumped for joy upon hearing the good news.

And that is, this broke cute administration just gave up some P16 billion in funding from the Japanese government. Again—that's P16 billion!

What could be the strangely amusing reason for its doing that? Well, it's precisely because this cute administration does not have ... well, money.

It may be a case of the dog chasing its own tail on top of a spinning ball on a running carousel. But I could be wrong.

***

RETURNED by this cute administration to the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, or JBIC, were several loans for this petty thing called infrastructure.

It seems this cute administration does not have what is called "counterpart" money for the JBIC infrastructure funding.

After all, what do we need infrastructure for, if not for this frivolous thing called economic development, simply known among government economists as "growth?"

In turn, economic growth is the one and only answer to poverty, which is the result of those 11 million or so people's being so foolishly jobless.

It doesn't take rocket science, or something like that, to know that we cannot solve poverty with Gloriaetta's frequent visits to depressed areas to bring lots of cheer instead of jobs.

***

IN BUSINESS, therefore, people are saying that our only way toward fast and furious work on infrastructure is through private initiative.

With private investments in infrastructure, however, we have a lot of work to do. We don't seem to know how to go about it.

That protracted quarrel over the Naia Terminal 3, featuring the government and the private sector, is the perfect bad example.

But aside from various crisscrossing interests, when it comes to multibillion-peso infra projects, our government does not mind taking its sweet time making decisions.

Last month, a proposal for a $1.2-billion infra project made its long journey to the Cabinet for final approval. Only heaven knows when it will come.

***

AFTER a couple of years going through a series of pre-Cabinet government approvals, the MRT-7 project finally made it to the Cabinet.

My latest info is that foreign investors, eager to join the project, have been dying to hear word from the Cabinet.

Among them is the German group called Siemens, which is expected to assume the lead role in the project, once it puts a huge stake in the MRT-7 consortium.

The project already went through the so-called "first pass" with the DOTC, which endorsed it to the Neda-Investment Coordinating Council, chaired by Gloriaetta herself.

After the "final" (hopefully) approval of the Cabinet, the project must then go through a so-called Swiss challenge.

This has nothing to do with secret bank accounts, because the "Swiss challenge" is just an opening for other groups to steal the project from the original proponent.

***

HOPEFULLY, if no other group comes forward to offer the government another "deal" for MRT-7, the project will see its financial closing by the end of the year.

Hopefully again, its construction can start next year, and in three to four years, the new train system will start running. Phew!

But such a timetable can only come true, if the original proponent is chosen.

Otherwise, if a blessed new group comes out, we start all over again. Meaning, another four to five years of paper work on approval and such!

And any delay will be bad for us. For one, the interest of foreign groups in MRT-7 is a clear signal of the return of foreign investments here—huge investments.

As I said, the train project will cost about $1.2 billion. It does not even include the real estate development of the 200-hectare train depot. This is one whole city.

***

NOW the real estate portion can easily cost at least $500 million easily, or about P30 billion, depending on the peso exchange rate by the time the project pushes through.

Said to be interested in the real estate development, of course, is one of the local groups in the consortium, none other than Tatang Henry Sy's SM group.

Tatang may again banner the real estate development with another one of his huge malls, every one of which is almost the size of the municipality of San Juan.

We need this MRT-7 project, and surely many more like it, if only for its ripple effects in the construction sector.

It will create more jobs, particularly for the unskilled workers, who can only work either as laborers in construction projects or as snatchers of cellular phones.

***

ONE simple innovation in investment activities, meanwhile, is attracting interest in the business sector. It is being promoted by the SEC.

You see, the SEC recently ruled that the acquisition by the foreign (Swiss) group called Cemco of the listed local company called Union Cement is not covered by the "tender offer" rule.

The SEC ruling raised some eyebrows in business as high as the dome of the Araneta Coliseum.

Under the rule, if you want to take majority control of a listed company, you must offer to buy out all the other minority stockholders. It's for the protection of the public.

Cemco simply bought the holding company, which owns two other companies which in turn own Union Cement and—presto—it got away from the rule.

To top it all, the SEC said it was okay.

From now on, business can simply form holdings companies, sell holdings in them instead of holdings in listed firms, and the tender offer rule is gone. What an innovation!

***

STILL, the case of the Cemco takeover of the listed Union Cement bears watching, because the complainant before the SEC is not giving up.

It is the National Life Insurance, which is a minority stockholder of Union Cement. The company is asking the SEC to force Cemco to follow the rule.

Recently, it presented to the SEC an argument that the rule covers any "type of acquisition," whether it hides behind holding companies or under the skirt of your mother-in-law.

The rule is contained in the Securities Regulations Code, which Congress passed about four years ago.

National Life Insurance even presented to the SEC minutes of the bicameral committee on the passage of the law.

The provision for tender offer, based on the minutes, was intended to address the interest of the minority stockholders, period.

It is mandatory, in other words, and mandatory means no exception.

Smart raises Meridian stake

By Clarissa S. Batino

MOBILE phone leader Smart Communications Inc. has acquired an additional 9 percent of Meridian Telekoms Inc., bringing its stake in the high-speed Internet provider to 49 percent.

The country's largest wireless phone company yesterday said it would eventually acquire all of Meridian from its current shareholders before the end of this year.

Smart bought 40 percent of Meridian in September 2004 for an undisclosed amount but basing on the par value of P100 per share, the 2.5 million common shares in Meridian are worth P250 million.

Smart's acquisition of the 9 percent followed the National Telecommunications Commission's approval last Dec. 12 of Meridian's petition to allow the transfer of common shares.

A domestic telecom carrier must secure the NTC's approval for any change in ownership exceeding 40 percent.

Meridian must also secure the go-ahead of the Congress before it could sell 100 percent of the company to Smart.

Meridian is a broadband player formerly controlled by the family of Mark Jimenez.

Established in 1996, Meridian operates a data leased network and an international leased line, allowing it to provide high-speed broadband Internet access to its subscribers.

Manila Water to sell shares to the public

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

MANILA Water Co. Inc. of the Ayala group, the water distributor in the East Zone, plans to offer P4.15 billion worth of shares to international and local investors by March.

In a report to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Manila Water planned to sell the shares at a minimum of P5 apiece.

Manila Water plans to sell as many as 830 million common shares, consisting of 550 million primary shares and 280 million shares held by Ayala Corp., United Utilities, BPI Capital and certain employees.

The bulk of the common shares will be sold in the international markets with 581 million shares set aside for the international tranche in February, followed by the sale of up to 249 million for the domestic offer in March.

Manila Water will use the proceeds for capital expenditure, concession fee payments and general corporate purposes, it said in its report.

Manila Water has tapped as managers BPI Capital Corp. and UBS Investment Bank for its public offering.

Investment banks target March 17 as the listing date for the shares.

Manila Water generated P4.2 billion in revenues last year, up from P3.78 billion in 2003. Based on unaudited figures, its net earnings stood at P1.34 billion last year from P1.15 billion in 2003.

Last year, the International Finance Corp. (IFC), the private sector arm of the World Bank invested $45 million in Manila Water, which has been operating the East concession of the privatized Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) since 1997.

This brought IFC's investments in Manila Water to $75 million (P4.2 billion), broken down into $15 million in equity, $30 million in fresh loan facilities, and a US$30 million equivalent yen loan closed earlier in 2003.

The water company was formed only in August 1997.

From a consortium that inherited seemingly insurmountable network losses (up to 63 percent), Manila Water managed to turn the company around to become one of the country's fastest growing organizations.

Other major stockholders are Ayala Corp., United Utilities (a leading water and power company in the United Kingdom), Mitsubishi Corp. of Japan (one of the largest trading firms in the world) and BPI Capital.

Tan submits . . .

From page B1

coon has a net worth of $1.6 billion. Tan ranked 12th in Forbes' recent list of the 40 richest people in Southeast Asia recently.

The Lorenzo family owns 20 percent of Del Monte Pacific, giving it first-call rights on Cirio's stake. MCI Inc., the holding company of the Lorenzos, has the right to match any final offer that Cirio would receive and accept for its shares.

SMC, Southeast Asia's biggest food and beverage firm, is not likely to jack up its bid for the 40-percent Del Monte Pacific stake.

Sources familiar with SMC's activities said the company was unfazed by the reports and was focusing on its bid to acquire control of National Foods Ltd., Australia's dairy giant.

A successful acquisition of Del Monte Pacific would have allowed SMC to expand its food and beverage reach into the Indian subcontinent.

SMC said it saw major opportunities in line with its regional leap after it announced its bid for control of National Foods for $1.37 billion.

National Foods is Australia's biggest milk processor. Its products include milk, yoghurt, gourmet cheese and cream. The board of National Foods unanimously backed SMC's offer and recommended that stockholders accept it in the absence of a superior proposal. *With a report from Elizabeth L. Sanchez*

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of January 12, 2005)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS & FINANCIAL SERVICES					
BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	2.85	2.85	2.85	2.85	4,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	26	26	25.5	25.5	346,000
Bank of the Phil. Islands	53	53	52	53	323,300
China Banking Corp.	560	560	560	560	1,050
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	47	47	47	47	4,800
Export and Ind. Bank Inc.	0.42	0.42	0.41	0.42	1,830,000
International Exch. Bank	16.75	16.75	16.5	16.5	1,388,200
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	26	26	25	26	585,300
Phil. Savings Bank	28.5	28.5	28.5	28.5	500
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	13.75	13.75	13.5	13.5	12,400
Security Bank Corp.	28.5	28.5	28.5	28.5	3,500
Union Bank of the Phil.	23.75	23.75	23.75	23.75	30,000
FINANCIAL SERVICES					
PCI Leasing & Fin. Inc.	1.36	1.36	1.36	1.36	175,000
Sun Life Financial Inc.	1800	1800	1795	1795	730
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	18	18	17.75	17.75	21,500
Digital Telecom Phils Inc.	1.92	1.92	1.84	1.86	41,432,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	925	925	895	900	50,230
Ipeople Inc.	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.6	140,000
ISM Communications Corp.	0.034	0.034	0.034	0.034	200,000
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp.	2.22	2.22	2.22	2.22	12,000
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	3.2	3.25	3.1	3.2	27,924,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	1325	1325	1310	1320	390,160
Ivantage Corp.	0.62	0.62	0.62	0.62	460,000
Philweb Corp.	0.012	0.012	0.011	0.012	150,700,000
POWER & ENERGY					
Manila Electric Co. A	15.5	15.5	15.5	15.5	17,600
Manila Electric Co. B	25	25	24.25	24.5	1,312,200
Petron Corp.	3.4	3.45	3.35	3.4	4,411,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	1.06	1.1	1.06	1.1	41,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Aboitiz Trans. Sys. Corp.	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	41,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	6.5	6.5	6.3	6.3	430,000
Keppel Phils. Marine Inc.	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	10,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Engineering Equip. Inc.	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	1,340,000
Fortune Cement Corp.	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.78	10,000
Holcim Philippines Inc.	2.55	2.65	2.5	2.55	8,974,000
Republic Cement Corp.	0.9	0.9	0.86	0.87	130,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	2.9	3	2.9	3	7,128,000
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	31	31.5	31	31.5	70,500
Jollibee Foods Corp.	28	28	27	27	74,300
Pancake House Inc.	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	10,000
RFM Corp.	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	100,000
San Miguel Corp. A	58	58.5	58	58	46,900
San Miguel Corp. B	78.5	79	78	79	41,600
Vitarich Corp.	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	350,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.005	17,000,000
Abacus Con Res & Hdg B	0.0055	0.0055	0.0055	0.0055	10,000,000
Ayala Corp.	6.7	6.8	6.6	6.7	7,448,000
Alsons Cons. Res. Inc.	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	200,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	3.25	3.25	3.2	3.25	22,977,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.023	0.023	0.023	0.023	500,000
A. Soriano Corp.	1.7	1.7	1.64	1.64	705,000
APC Group Inc.	0.085	0.085	0.085	0.085	1,000,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008	91,000,000
Baguio Gold Holdings Corp.	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.12	26,000
Balabac Resources & Hldgs	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	80,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc.	18.5	20.5	18.5	20.25	97,800
Benpres Holdings Corp.	0.69	0.69	0.67	0.67	19,830,000
Basic Consolidated Inc.	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.16	1,800,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.225	0.225	0.22	0.22	2,220,000
Southeast Asian Cement	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19	500,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.85	10,180,000
Ever-Gotesco Resources	0.029	0.029	0.029	0.029	1,000,000
Fil-Hispano Holdings Corp.	6.2	6.2	6	6.1	1,607,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	30.5	30.5	30.5	30.5	318,500
Forum Pacific Inc.	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.15	500,000
Global Equities Inc.	0.0575	0.0575	0.0575	0.0575	2,700,000
House Of Investments Inc.	0.79	0.79	0.78	0.79	1,880,000
Ionics Inc.	1.46	1.46	1.46	1.46	180,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	3.1	3.1	3	3	1,436,000
Keppel Holdings	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.42	30,000
Macroasia Corp.	2.3	2.3	2.26	2.3	254,000
Megaworld Corp.	1.22	1.22	1.2	1.22	1,160,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.38	0.38	0.36	0.37	19,650,000
Prime Orion Phils. Inc.	0.155	0.155	0.15	0.15	2,670,000
Prime Media Holdings Inc.	1.04	1.04	1.04	1.04	1,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	0.85	0.85	0.85	0.85	400,000
Solid Group Inc.	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	10,000
Seafront Resources Corp.	0.25	0.25	0.24	0.24	50,000
Tanduay Holdings Inc.	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9	70,000
Uniwide Holdings Inc.	0.13	0.135	0.13	0.135	2,640,000
Waterfront Phils. Inc.	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19	200,000
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Music Semiconductors Corp.	1.6	1.66	1.6	1.66	110,000
Mabuhay Vinyl Corp.	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.88	20,000
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICES					
Belle Corp.	0.57	0.57	0.56	0.56	1,690,000
Fairmont Holdings Inc.	0.98	0.98	0.98	0.98	50,000
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	0.52	0.52	0.52	0.52	200,000
Manila Jockey Club	2.8	2.8	2.8	2.8	46,000
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp. (Pdr)	18	18	18	18	208,300
Macroasia Corp. Warrants	0.0675	0.0675	0.0675	0.0675	200,000
PLDT (10% Pref.) Series U	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	2,100
PLDT (10% Pref) Series V	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	1,600
PLDT (10% Pref) Series X	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	1,600
PLDT (10% Pref) Series Z	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	1,900
PLDT 10% Pref Series Aa	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	1,100
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	7.4	7.4	7.3	7.3	485,000
Araneta Properties Inc.	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	100,000
C & P Homes Inc.	0.26	0.26	0.26	0.26	9,590,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.13	0.14	0.13	0.14	13,400,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.33	0.35	0.33	0.35	3,420,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.14	1.14	1.12	1.14	4,450,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.16	0.17	0.16	0.16	5,250,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.56	0.6	0.56	0.6	3,220,000
Phil Realty And Holdings	0.185	0.19	0.185	0.19	3,000,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	7.8	7.8	7.8	7.8	7,009,000
MINING					
Apex Mining Co. Inc. A	0.44	0.44	0.42	0.44	320,000
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.013	0.013	0.013	0.013	13,300,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	4.1	4.1	4	4	153,000
Benguet Corp. A	3.2	3.2	3	3	76,000
Dizon Copper Silver Mines	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	28,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.4	0.4	0.39	0.39	10,970,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.46	0.46	0.42	0.43	26,350,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.019	85,200,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.025	0.026	0.025	0.025	114,300,000
Omico Corp.	0.005	0.0055	0.005	0.005	581,000,000
Philex Mining Corp. A	0.82	0.82	0.8	0.81	3,070,000
Philex Mining Corp. B	0.84	0.84	0.82	0.82	7,340,000
OIL					
Imperial Res.	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	14,000,000
Interport Res.	0.0038	0.0038	0.0036	0.0036	18,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.006	0.006	0.0055	0.0055	234,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.006	0.006	0.0055	0.0055	133,000,000
The Philodrill Corp. A	0.26	0.26	0.25	0.25	180,000
Pacifica	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	1,000,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.0525	0.055	0.05	0.05	2,500,000

DISCLOSURES

CENTRAL Azucarera de Tarlac has changed the venue of its Jan. 25 annual stockholders' meeting, from its principal office in San Miguel, Tarlac City to 6/F JCS Building, 119 Dela Rosa St., Legaspi Village, Makati City.

* * *

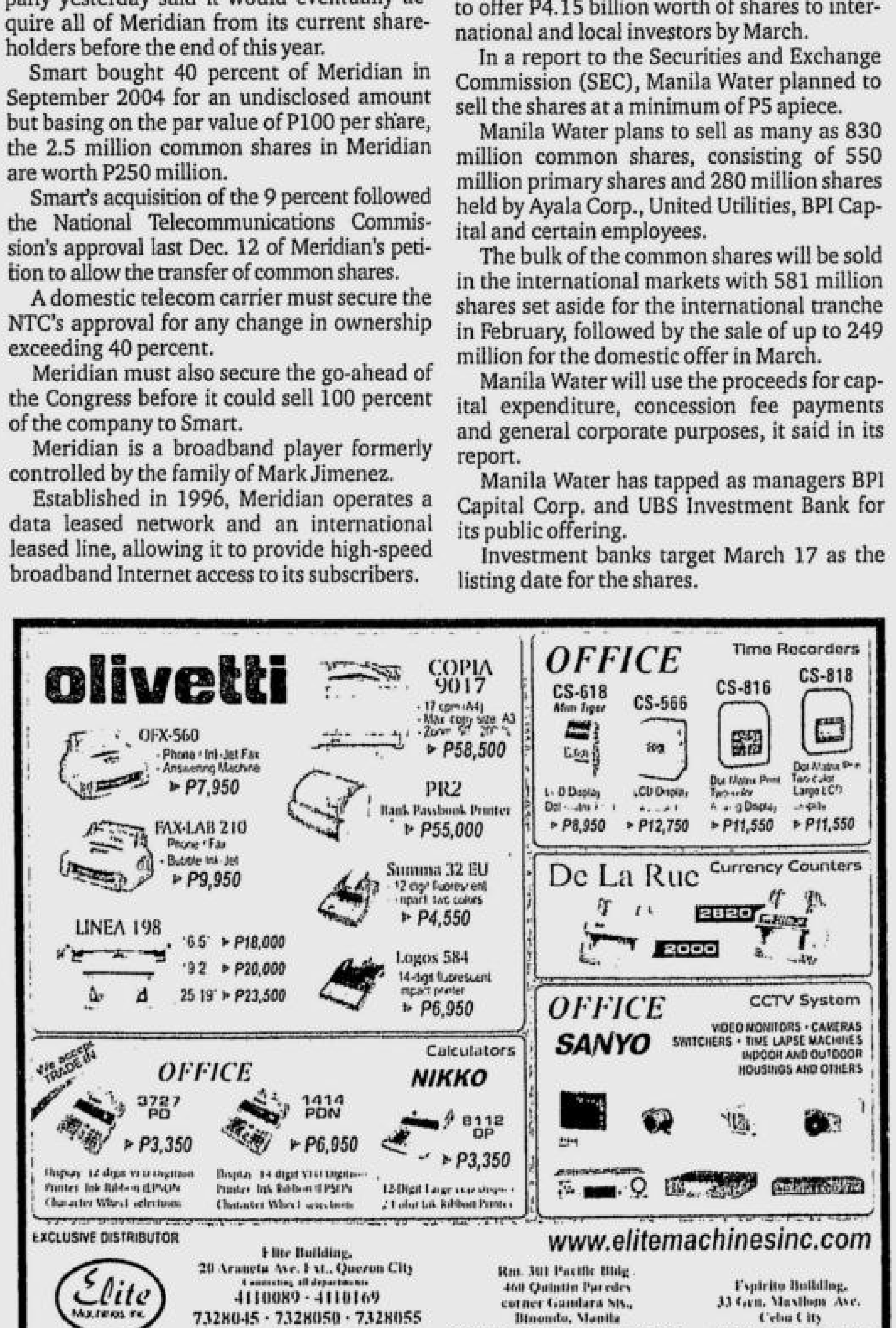
AUGUSTO Nilo has been elected director of **Cashbounds Inc.**, replacing Stanley Saguinsin, who resigned from that post but who will remain as general manager.

* * *

ELPIDIO Ibañez, president and chief operating officer of **First Philippine Holdings Corp.**, acquired 1,050 shares of FPHC stock. ***Compiled by D.J. Yap, PDI Research***

CURRENCIES

January 12, 2005 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.762543846	1.000000	56.0620
Japan	Yen	0.007384	0.009683	0.5428
United Kingdom	Pound	1.432515	1.878600	105.3181
Hongkong	Dollar	0.097805	0.128261	7.1906
Switzerland	Franc	0.644803	0.845594	47.4057
Canada	Dollar	0.625857	0.820749	46.0128
Singapore	Dollar	0.465278	0.610165	34.2071
Australia	Dollar	0.581828	0.763009	42.7758
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.022716	2.652590	148.7095
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.203345	0.266667	14.9499
Brunei	Dollar	0.463863	0.608310	34.1031
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000082	0.000108	0.0061
Thailand	Baht	0.019543	0.025629	1.4368
UAE	Dirham	0.207641	0.272301	15.2657
Euro	Euro	1	1.311400	73.5197
Argentina	Peso	0.257616	0.337838	18.9399
Brazil	REAL	0.28133	0.368936	20.6833
Denmark	Kroner	0.134443	0.176308	9.8842
India	Rupee	0.017458	0.022894	1.2835
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.200696	0.263193	14.7551
Mexico	New Peso	0.068039	0.089226	5.0022
New Zealand	Dollar	0.533471	0.699594	39.2206
Norway	Kroner	0.121937	0.159908	8.9648
Pakistan	Rupee	0.012807	0.016795	0.9416
South Africa	Rand	0.128221	0.168149	9.4268
Korea	Won	0.00073	0.000957	0.0537
Sweden	Kroner	0.110719	0.145197	8.1400
Syria	Pound	0.01469	0.019264	1.0800
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.023874	0.031309	1.7552
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.000398	0.000522	0.0293



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PLDT exceeds ₱24-B profit target for 2004

By Clarissa S. Batino

PHILIPPINE Long Distance Telephone Co. has substantially exceeded its P24-billion profit target in 2004 due to higher recurring income and one-time gains from the consolidation of its wireless business, its top official said.

PLDT's affiliate Pilipino Telephone Corp. reported an exceptional gain of about P3.7 billion last year. Analysts said the market had already priced in a P25-billion 2004 net income into PLDT's share price.

PLDT's single biggest shareholder, First Pacific Co. Ltd., is also leveraging on the telecom giant's profitability to raise low-priced funds, which the parent company would use to expand in the region.

First Pacific yesterday said it was selling $199-million, 5-year zero coupon debt notes convertible into PLDT shares. First Pacific owns about 24 percent of PLDT.

PLDT chair Manuel Pangilinan, who is also managing director of First Pacific, said the regional firm was now ready to invest again. He said telecom and infrastructure were top picks for the group.

He stressed the Hong Kong-based conglomerate, which he had built using the capital of the Salim family of Indonesia, would not give up its stake in PLDT.

"We have no intention of selling down at all in PLDT. This is just a financing exercise for First Pacific and we included an equity kicker which is PLDT to lower the cost of our borrowing," Pangilinan said in an interview.

There are cash settlement options under the agreement, he said, that would allow First Pacific to satisfy the exchange rights without affecting the company's investment in PLDT.

"It is fully our intention to maintain our present level of investment in PLDT," he said.

The telecom giant's recurring income alone, according to Pangilinan, already exceeded the P24-billion profit target last year. "We are definitely not in a fiscal

PLDT/B4

VOLVO ADVISORY

THE 2004 PRICE PROTECTION PROGRAM FOR THE VOLVO RANGE OF LUXURY VEHICLES IS UNTIL JANUARY 31, 2005.

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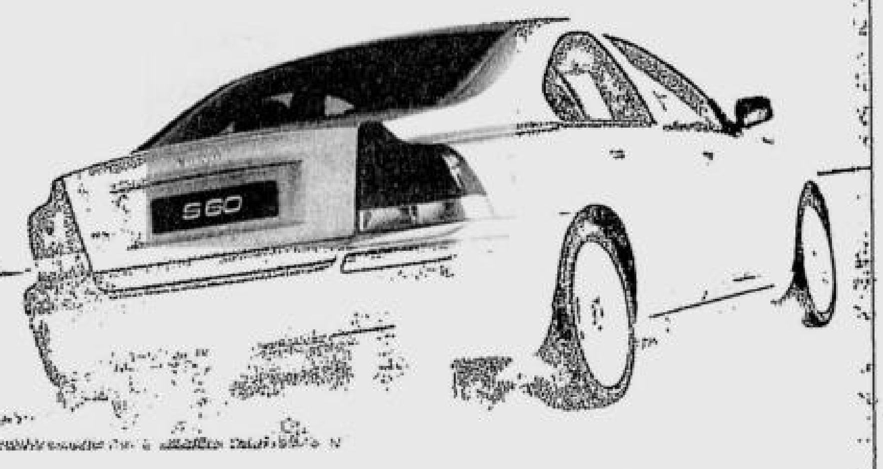

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FirstPac sells $199M in debt notes to finance expansion

HONG KONG/MANILA—First Pacific Co. Ltd., a Southeast Asia-focused conglomerate, has positioned itself for expansion by selling $199 million in debt convertible to shares in its 24 percent-held Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT).

"We're now ready to invest again in telcos and infrastructure," First Pacific managing director Manuel Pangilinan said in an interview.

Pangilinan, who is also chair of PLDT, said First Pacific planned to maintain its 24-percent stake in PLDT.

"First Pacific has no plans whatsoever of disposing of or relinquishing our substantial interest in PLDT," he said in a later statement. "This is simply a financing exercise and it is fully our intention to maintain our present level of investment in PLDT."

PLDT shares fell 2.94 percent to P1,320 early yesterday afternoon. Trading of First Pacific shares were suspended before the start of trade.

First Pacific sold the five-year zero-coupon notes exchangeable to PLDT shares at P1,645.6 , a 21 percent premium to the stock's Tuesday close of 1,360, a source familiar with the situation said.

Analysts in Manila said PLDT's fall, which helped drag the main stock index down 1.37 percent, was due more to profit-taking than concern the bond sale would dilute First Pacific's stake in PLDT.

PLDT's revenues, profits and share price have soared in the past two years on strong demand for mobile phone services in the Philippines.

Pangilinan said there would be no significant dilution of First Pacific's stake because bondholders also had an option to convert the debt to cash. The $199 million bond value is equivalent to about 1.6 percent of PLDT's outstanding shares.

Pangilinan also said PLDT's net profit for 2004 was expected to be higher than its target of P24 billion.

"Recurring (income) is seen above P24 billion. The net profit should be higher," he said.

AB Capital analyst Jose Vistan said the market had already priced in a P25-billion net profit for PLDT on expectations of a strong fourth quarter as people bought new mobile phones or used Christmas bonuses to upgrade their services.

First Pacific also owns 48 percent of PT Indofood Sukses Makmur Tbk, the world's largest maker of instant noodles.

Morgan Stanley analyst Rob Hart said Pangilinan was thought to be interested in acquisitions in Thailand, but he added there were no clear targets for the firm.

"Obviously, this adds to some of the reinvestment risk," Hart said. "I'm glad the company's got money, but now, which assets are they going to buy?"

The note sale was underwritten by UBS and was completed overnight. The sale was expanded from an original $150 million size through the exercise of a greenshoe option *Reuters*

Taiwan firm putting up factory in RP

By Ronnel W. Domingo

A TAIWANESE electronics manufacturing firm is planning to transfer its operations to the country from China mainly due to the huge pool of engineers in the Philippines, Trade Secretary Cesar V. Purisima yesterday said.

Purisima said the company, LTW Technology Co. LTD, wanted to put up in the country a factory for personal computer-related waterproof connector and cable assembly.

The official said LTW's decision stemmed from the lack of engineers in China who could undertake research and development projects for the company.

Purisima said the firm had already sent a team to check out the Philippines as a possible site for its new investment.

"(LTW officials) were pleased with the capability of the country to house their operations," he said. "Their team has toured various universities in Metro Manila and noted that the country has an abundant pool of engineers to develop new products for their market."

LTW products and services range from waterproof connectors, cable assemblies, plastic injection molding, silicon rubber, key pad products, tool making, mechanical and electrical design, and finished product assembly and testing.

Among the connectors that LTW make are the circular ones for field installation and panel, waterproof wire harness, M-series, D-sub series, RJ-45, USB mini din, LAN cable tester and plastic injection products.

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As of December 20, 2004

ASSETS		
Cash and Cash Items	P	803,028,065.57
Due from Bangko Sentral		1,317,706,187.99
Due from Other Banks		1,857,404,258.73
Interbank Loans Receivable		620,000,000.00
Trading Account Securities (Net)		1,265,092,765.07
Investments in Bonds and Other Debt Instruments (Net)		11,239,855,135.49
Loans, Discounts & Advances (Net)		23,559,864,279.93
Equity Investments (Net)		25,000,000.11
Bank Premises, Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (Net)		1,546,829,611.63
Other Assets (Net):		
Property Owned/Acquired		2,078,464,255.75
Others		1,702,648,881.10
TOTAL ASSETS	P	46,015,893,441.37
LIABILITIES		
Demand Deposits	P	1,887,674,543.90
Savings Deposits		23,572,015,527.98
Time Deposits		14,605,027,934.99
Due to Bangko Sentral		12,375,000.00
Outstanding Checks/Payment Orders		172,408,765.45
Bills Payable:		
BSP-Rediscounts/Special Programs		-
Unearned Income & Other Deferred Credits		38,191,553.13
Other Liabilities		980,039,124.77
TOTAL LIABILITIES	P	41,267,732,450.22
CAPITAL ACCOUNTS		
Capital Stock	P	1,795,015,200.00
Surplus		2,613,589,713.84
Surplus Reserves		339,556,077.31
TOTAL CAPITAL ACCOUNTS	P	4,478,160,991.15
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND CAPITAL ACCOUNTS	P	46,015,893,441.37
CONTINGENT ACCOUNTS		
Bills for Collection	P	474,767.70
Assets Held Under Trust and Investment Management Agreements		661,114,651.56
Invested in:		
Government Securities		223,986,373.98
Other Securities, Debt Instruments and Shares of Stock		51,714,138.99
Other Assets		385,414,138.59
Accountabilities:		
Trust & Other Fiduciary		153,758,621.29
Common Trust Funds		-
Investment/Fund Management		507,356,030.27
Other Contingent Accounts		88,518,518.27
TOTAL CONTINGENT ACCOUNTS	P	750,107,937.53
Additional Information:		
1 Deposits of		
a) Government	P	-
b) Banks		631,637.02
c) Trust Department		380,949,165 30
2. a. Total Non-Performing Loans		1,397,766,167.73
b. Classified Loans & Other Risk Assets		2,838,645,647.42
c. General Loan Loss Reserve		222,804,602.78
d. Specific Loan Loss Reserve		591,742,282.98
e. Total DOSRI Loans/Advances		1,693,686,526.01
f Past Due DOSRI Loans Advances		-
g. Ratio of Non-Performing Loans to Total Loan Portfolio		5.22%
h. Ratio of Total DOSRI Loans/Advances to Total Loan Portfolio		6.33%
i. Ratio of Past Due DOSRI to Total Loan Portfolio		
j. Return on Equity		12.94%

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(Sgd) PASCUAL M. GARCIA, III
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Doc No. 431
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Page No. CLXVIII
Series of 2005

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Overhaul of tax structure planned

By Michelle V. Remo

THE DEPARTMENT of Finance is looking at overhauling the country's "too complicated" tax structure, to make it taxpayer- and investor-friendly.

Such a move, it said, was necessary to improve the government's fiscal health.

Finance Secretary Juanita Amatong admitted that the present tax structure was not too business-friendly. Businesses cited the complex tax system as a one of factors that were hampering growth and discouraging investments.

The finance chief said the DOF would start working on fixing the tax structure once the task of pushing for the legislation of the Arroyo administration's proposed revenue-raising measures was completed.

"It's a complicated tax structure that we have. There are too many taxes, and at the same time too many special laws that grant incentives," Amatong said.

She said that instead of applying different types of taxes and incentives to various sectors, the government would be better off imposing the fewest possible types taxes but at the same time capturing the most number of taxpayers possible.

Another finance official explained that too many types of taxes made it complicated for taxpayers, especially corporate payers, to properly record their tax obligations, unlike when there are fewer tax taxes and uniform rates.

He added that this also made it difficult for the government, the Bureau of Internal Revenue in particular, to administer taxes.

"When the tax structure is complicated, there is a tendency (for a tax examiner) to be subjective. That's where graft and corruption may come in," the finance official said. He explained that with simplified taxation, there would be no confusion as to what tax rates to impose on a certain taxpayer.

PLDT exceeds ₱24-B profit target for 2004

From page B3

crisis."

"Then there are even exceptional gains, which we have already disclosed previously," he said.

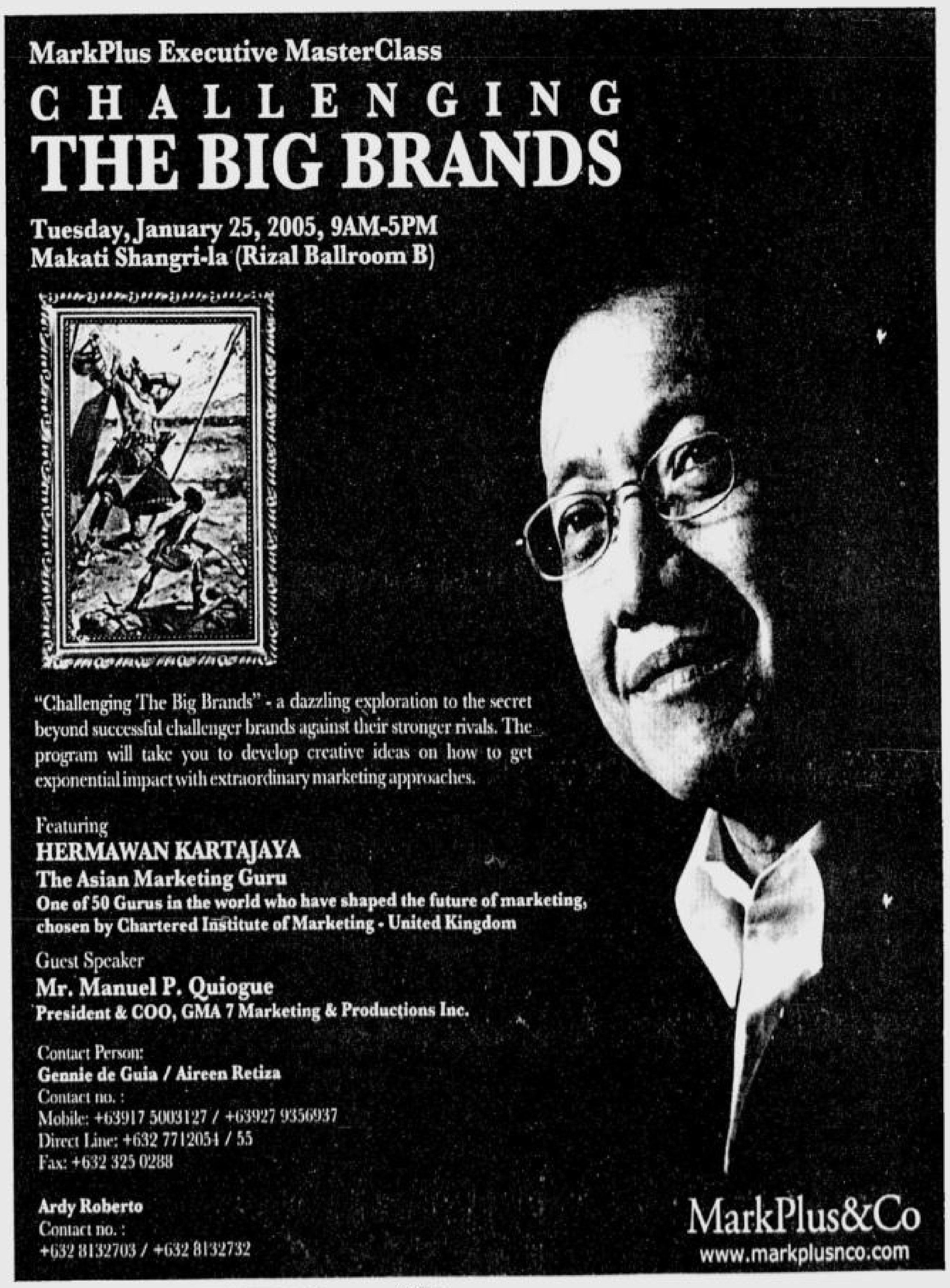
But this year, Pangilinan would not commit a specific target, saying it was getting increasingly harder to make a forecast as PLDT's wireless units go deeper into the lower income segment of the market. He said though that 2005 would be better than 2004.

PLDT registered a net income of P20 billion in the first nine months of 2004, prompting Pangilinan to raise the profit target for 2004 to P24 billion from P22 billion. Strong first-half results in 2004 also led him to announce a higher number from the original profit target of P18 billion.

Smart Communications Inc. accounted for P18 billion of the profit during the first three quarters. By the end of the year, Smart's subsidiary Piltel would report more than P7 billion in net income following changes in Piltel's revenue-sharing deal with Smart.

Of the P7 billion in profit that accrued to Piltel last year because of fee changes, P3.7 billion was non-recurring. This year, Piltel is expected to register a net income of more than P3 billion.

Pangilinan said he was worried that wireless subscriber take-up may slowdown this year from more than 19 million in end-2004. But despite the anticipated slowdown, he said profits of the company's wireless subsidiaries would remain robust in 2005.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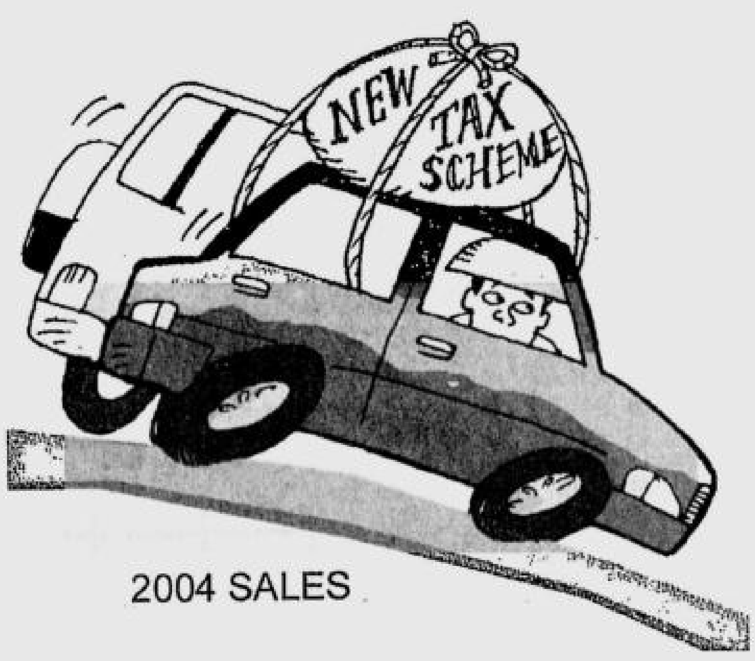
New tax scheme drags vehicle sales down



By Ronnel W. Domingo

VEHICLE sales slid 4.6 percent in 2004 mainly due to sluggish demand for commercial vehicles.

Recent price increases brought about by the imposition of a new excise tax scheme resulted in a substantial drop in the sales of commercial vehicles.

Industry sales for last year reached 88,003 units, down from 92,248 units sold in 2003.

The 2004 sales figure was about half-percent higher than the forecast of 87,600 units. However, the assemblers originally hoped to sell a total of 100,000 units for the entire year.

In a joint report, the Chamber of Automotive Manufacturers of the Philippines (Campi) and the Truck Manufacturers Association (TMA) said that while the new tax scheme boosted turnover of passengers cars "significantly," this was not enough to register growth in overall sales.

An increase in the demand was seen in low-displacement passenger car models mainly due to increasing fuel prices, the groups claimed.

The introduction of new sedan models and the effect of the new excise tax resulted in a 37-percent growth in passenger car sales, they added.

A total of 33,182 passenger cars were sold in 2004 compared to 24, 234 the previous year.

Commercial vehicle sales declined by 19.4 percent as a result of the new excise tax as well as the slow first half sales due to the wait-and-see attitude of the market during the election season, the groups said in a statement.

The continued influx of imported used vehicles also pushed down sales of new vehicles, they claimed.

Sales of commercial vehicles—Asian utility vehicles, light commercial vehicles, light trucks, and trucks and buses—reached 54,821 units last year from 63,014 units in 2003.

Sales of of light trucks were down by 43 percent; AUVs, down by 42 percent, and trucks and buses, 2 percent. However, LCVs sales grew by 18 percent

In terms of total sales, Toyota Motor Philippines Corp. remained the market leader with a share of 33.2 percent.It sold 29,198 units in 2004, up by 5 percent from last year.

Mitsubishi Motors Philippines Corp. placed second with 14.5 percent of the market, selling 12,717 units. But this represented a 17.5-percent decline in sales in 2003.

Honda Cars Philippines Inc. came in third with 12 percent of the market. It sold 10,550 units last year, a decline of 30.8 percent from the year-ago figure.

In the passenger car segment, Toyota grabbed 46.7 percent of the market; Honda held 22.2 percent and Nissan Motors Philippines Inc. had 8 percent.

Toyota sold the biggest number of commercial vehicles, grabbing 25.2 percent of the market segment. Mitsubishi cornered 19.9 percent and Isuzu Philippines Corp. held 16.9 percent.

Lawmakers seek Epira amendment

By Abigail L. Ho

MEMBERS of the House committee on energy are pushing for the amendment of Republic Act No. 9136, or the Electric Power Industry Reform Act of 2001 (Epira).

The lawmakers are particularly interested in changing the provision giving the Department of Energy the authority to manage funds derived from power generators' financial assistance to their host communities.

House committee on energy chair and Lanao del Norte Rep. Alipio Cirilo Badelles said these financial benefits, mandated by Energy Regulation 1-94 (ER 1-94), should be managed by the local government units where the power generation facilities were located.

As mandated by ER 1-94, power plant owners should give 1 centavo for every kilowatt of electricity that they produce to the communities where their plants are situated.

Host communities of geothermal, hydroelectric and other types of power plants are entitled to that monetary benefit.

Under the current set-up, the DOE manages the funds derived from this mandate.

During a recent House committee on energy hearing, Badelles said members of the committee agreed that the local government units should be the ones handling the funds instead of the DOE.

He said Batangas Rep. Hermilando Mandanas proposed that power producers like the National Power Corp. and independent power producers directly remit their ER 1-94 requirements to the governments of their host communities.

The issue of whether or not the DOE should continue to be the custodian of the ER 1-94 funds was discussed because of some complaints that local government units raised against the DOE with regard to the funds.

These complaints include delays in the disbursement of project subsidies as well as the stringent requirements for the acquisition and utilization of funds from the ER 1-94 proceeds.

As a result, Badelles said the DOE had been ordered, as resolved during the same hearing, to present a thorough and detail report of how much of the ER 1-94 funds it had in its custody, including the interest this money had earned over the years.

The DOE's ER 1-94 had been estimated to run up to the hundreds of millions of pesos, he said.

Agri entrepreneurs make up 42% of EOY nominees

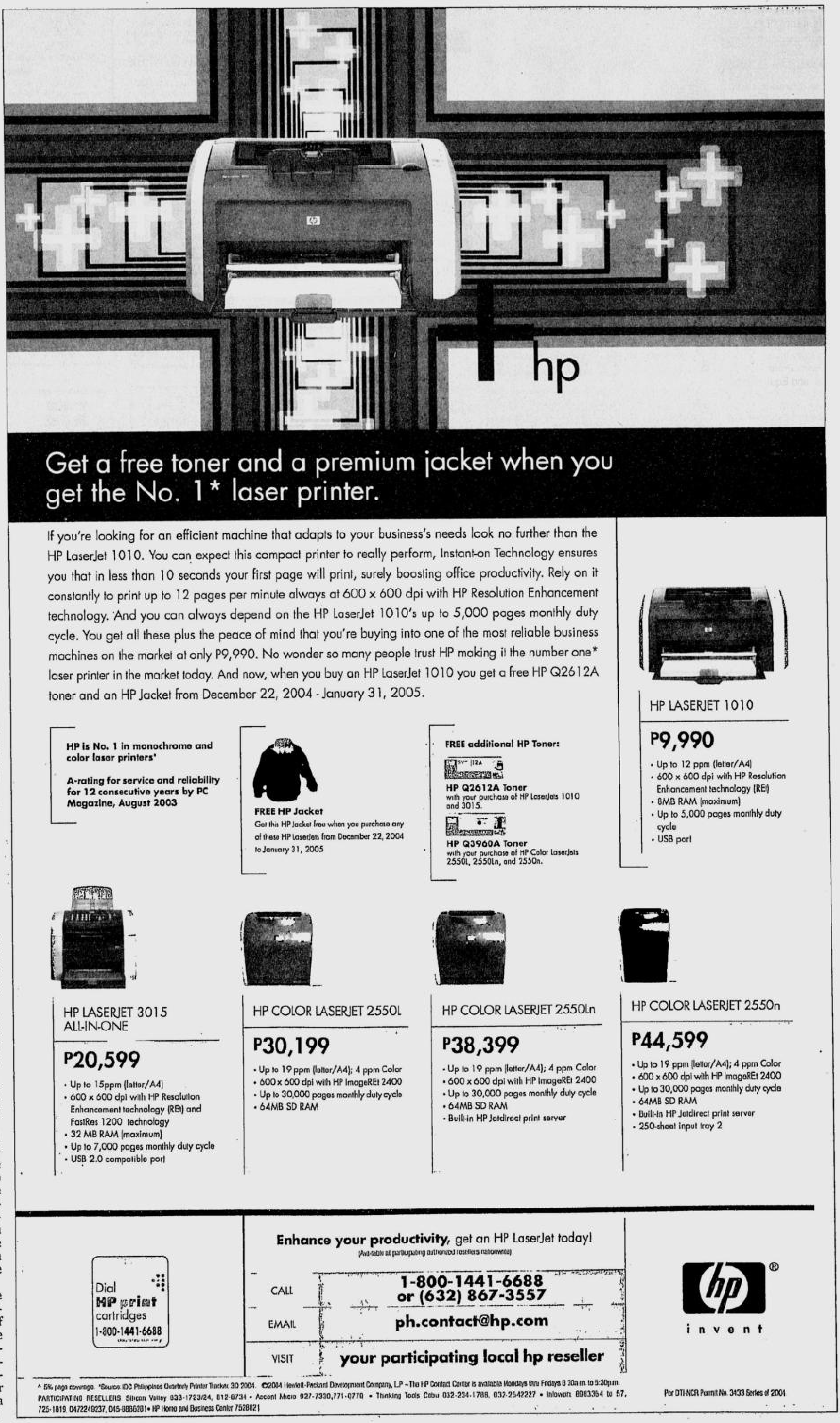
NOMINATIONS for the Entrepreneur of the Year (EOY) Philippines 2004, which came from all over the country, represented a wide range of industries particularly agribusiness, according to the SGV Foundation Inc., which spearheads the annual awards.

SGV Foundation chair David L. Balangue said nominees from the agribusiness and food sectors made up 42 percent of this year's roster, from which will be chosen the category winners and the Entrepreneur Of The Year Philippines 2004.

Balangue pointed out that the predominance of agribusiness entrepreneurs proved that the Entrepreneur Of The Year Philippines awards were timely.

Close to 50 nominations were submitted. The nominees were then ranked financially, using a system used by all Entrepreneur Of The Year participating countries. Nominees who made the short list will be interviewed by the committee. Based on the interviews, the committee will further trim the list and select the finalists. A distinguished panel of judges will then select the winners from among the finalists. The finalists and winners will be recognized in a grand awards banquet on Feb. 24, 2005 at the Rizal Ballroom of Makati Shangri-la.

"Generations of entrepreneurs have made an immeasurable contribution to the prosperity of nations, and to the quality of lives of people. We are delighted to play a role in the promotion and celebration of the spirit of entrepreneurship in Philippines, and the economic and social benefits it brings to the community," said Akbar Shah, managing director of The Citigroup Private Bank. The bank is a major sponsor of the EOY Philippines award.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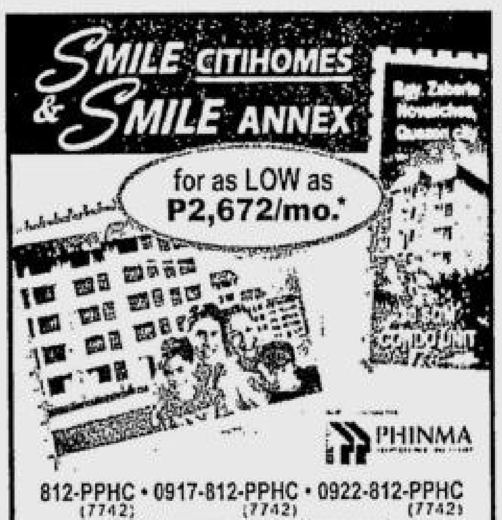

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03Lncr Invecsil 480T 7211877

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Low Mileage 0917-6297999

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1.5% Easy Car Loan 4112547/48

1.5% Easy Carloan 7815352/55

1.5% Fast Car Loan 6560140

1.5% w/oTaking Car 3650974/75

1.5% w/oTaking Car 7228942-43

•1HR Fast Car Loan 7125202•

2% w/o Taking Car 7262780

2% w/o taking car 7880183-84

2% w/o Taking Car 5315577

2% w/oTaking Car 8966630/33

2% w/oTaking Car 8959454

2% w/oTaking Car 7221021

2% w/oTaking Car 8870490/95

2% w/oTaking Car 3732081/82

2% w/out taking car 6567685

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PUBLIC NOTICES

NOTICE OF LOSS

Notice is hereby given that the plate No. TVL 894 registered under the name of ROSALINDA J. TINGCO was declared lost and could not be located as per affidavit dated Dec. 7, 2004 bearing Doc 458; Page 92; Book XIII; Series of 2004.
(PDI-Dec. 30,Jan 6&13,2005)

NATIONAL FOOD AUTHORITY
Region V, Legazpi City

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID FOR GRAINS HAULING SERVICES FOR NFA ALBAY

The National Food Authority, Regional Office, Legazpi City invites all qualified contractors to apply for eligibility to bid for the provisions of grains hauling services of NFA local and imported grains from NFA Albay for the calendar year 2005 to the following specific routes:

Route	Estimated Volume For Hauling (in MT)	Estimated Budget for the Contract Based on General Operating Fund
From Tabaco City to:		
Cam. Norte	11,500	P 7,843,000.00
Cam. Sur	20,000	8,160,000.00
Sorsogon	10,750	3,426,562.50
Ligao City	7,440	1,660,050.00
Libon, Albay	4,510	1,259,981.25
Legazpi City	12,600	1,764,000.00
From Legazpi City to:		
Cam. Norte	1,000	345,000.00
Cam. Sur	1,000	595,200.00
Sorsogon	500	106,875.00
TOTAL	69,300	P 25,362,968.75

The schedule of bidding activities are as follows:

Activity	Date	Time
1. Issuance of eligibility requirements	Jan. 5-11, 2005	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
2. Submission of eligibility requirements and issuance of bid documents	Jan. 12-20, 2005	8:00 AM to 5:00 PM
3. Pre-Bid Conference	Jan. 24, 2005	2:00 PM
4. Eligibility requirement checklist / Deadline for submission of bid Proposals/Opening of bids	Feb. 7, 2005	10:00 AM

The eligibility requirements and other bid documents can be obtained from the RBAC Secretariat after payment of a non-transferrable / non-refundable registration fee in the amount of P5,000.00.

To provide ample time to examine the bidding documents and to prepare their respective bids, prospective bidders may secure the needed eligibility requirements and other related documents at the time the invitation to apply for eligibility and to bid is first advertised.

For further inquiries, you may contact the RBAC Secretariat in the following telephone numbers: (052) 480-7933 / 480-7015 / 480-7085 / 820-008 and fax number (052) 480-7900.

THE NFA RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS THEREOF, TO WAIVE ANY FORMALITIES OR DEFECTS FOUND THEREIN, OR TO ACCEPT SUCH BIDS OR TO AWARD TO ANY CONTRACTOR WHOSE BID IS CONSIDERED MOST ADVANTAGEOUS TO THE NFA OR TO THE GOVERNMENT.

(Sgd.) JOSE B. GUEVARA
RBAC Chairman

(PDI – January 7 & 13, 2005)

PUBLIC NOTICES

NOTICE OF LOSS

Notice is hereby given that Plates No. DJG-639 registered in the name of MERLINDA GARCIA, was lost per Affidavit of Loss dated Jan. 7, 2005 under Notarial Registry of Atty Benjamin B. Tabaque as Doc. 300; Page 61; Book 286; Series of 2005.
(PDI - Jan. 13, 20 & 27, 2005)

Notice is hereby given that Plate No. TSL 985 registered under name of Rosemarie Capino was declared lost & could not be located as per affidavit dated Dec. 7, 2004 bearing Doc 230 Page 216 Book LXII Series 2004.
PDI - January 13, 2005

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DepED

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
PHYSICAL FACILITIES AND SCHOOLS ENGINEERING DIVISION
DepED Complex, Meralco Avenue
Pasig City, Philippines

Invitation for Bids

IFB Number : CY2004-SEMP-DepED-SBP-01
January 15, 2005
Loan No. 7118 PH
Project Title : Social Expenditure Management Project 2 (SEMP 2) Under the 10% Unallocated Portion
Contract Title : Conservation of Heritage School Building

1. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines has received a loan from the International Bank for the Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) to provide a budget support facility towards the financing of the Social Expenditure Management Project 2 (SEMP 2) in various currencies. It is intended that part of the proceeds of this facility will be applied to eligible payments under the contracts for School Building Program (SBP) to be implemented by the Department of Education (DepED).
2. The Department of Education (DepED) through the Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) of DepED Central Office, DepED Complex, Pasig City now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for the Conservation of School Buildings at Pampanga High School.

School	Scope of Works
Pampanga High School, San Fernando City, Pampanga	Conservation of Heritage School Building

3. For purposes of this bid, eligible bidders must have experience in works of similar nature and must have completed a restoration project for a heritage structure or complete repair/rehabilitation of school building, preferably under the guidance of a qualified conservation architect.
4. Interested eligible bidders may acquire a complete set of bid documents starting January 17, 2005 upon submission of letter of intent to the Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) at DepED Central Office, DepED Complex, Meralco Ave., Pasig City, Tel. No. 636-6543. A complete set of bid documents will be available for a non-refundable fee of Php 3,000.00.
5. The provisions in the Instructions to Bidders and in the General Conditions of the Contract are provisions of the World Bank Standard Bidding Documents, Procurement of Works.
6. Bids shall be valid for a period of ninety (90) days after Bid opening and must be accompanied by security of three (3%) percent of total bid price in the form of a bank guarantee; cashier's/Manager's check or an irrevocable letter of credit.
7. Pre Bid Conference and Bid Opening dates are as follows:

School	Venue	Pre Bid Conference	Bid Opening
Pampanga High School	Bulwagan ng Karunungan, DepED Central Office	January 31, 2005 / 2:00 PM	February 14, 2005 / 10:00 AM

8. The Department of Education reserves the right to accept or reject any bid; or to annul the bidding process or reject all bids at any time prior to contract award without incurring any liability to Bidders.

(Sgd.) JUAN MIGUEL M. LUZ
Undersecretary and Chair, Bids and Awards Committee
DepED Complex, Meralco Avenue, Pasig City

(PDI – January 13 & 20, 2005)

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ESTHER PEREZ HERNANDEZ

Died peacefully in the Grace of our Lord
on January 11, 2005 at the age of 92.

Her bereaved family, relatives and friends request the readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Her remains lie in state at La Funeraria Paz, G. Araneta Avenue, Quezon City.

Interment will be on January 16, 2005 after the 8:00 a.m. Mass at North Cemetery.

Our Dearly Beloved Father

Carlos "Charlie" Arcega de Leon

of Mandaluyong City

Peacefully joined our Lord on January 11, 2005 at the age of 85.

He is survived by his wife Luningning; children Miriam & Antonio Cabanas, Eric & Lin, Noel & Loreta, Dan & Herminia, Deborah & Rickynel Ricio, Carlos Jr. & Josefina; grandchildren, great grandchildren, nephews, nieces and relatives.

His remains lie in state at Funeraria Nacional, Araneta Avenue, Quezon City.

Interment will be on Saturday, January 15, 2005 at Mandaluyong Municipal Cemetery at 9:00 a.m.

"...absent from the body to be present with the Lord."
Matthew 10:39

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PostalBank Expands presence in the Visayas Region

THE PHILIPPINE Postal Savings Bank Inc. opens another branch in Himamaylan City, Negros Occidental, bringing it to a total of four branches in the Visayas region. The branch is the latest addition in its branch expansion program following the opening of two other branches last November 2004 in the municipalities of Bula and Tigaon, both in the Bicol Region.

The blessing and inauguration of the new branch located at GM Building, Rizal Street, Barangay 2, Himamaylan City is scheduled on Jan 14. It will be graced in the presence of no less than Secretary Leandro R. Mendoza of the Department of Transportation and Communication (DOTC). Among the other dignitaries who will be gracing the affair are; Congressman Monico O. Puentebella of the Lone District of Bacolod City, Congressman Ignacio T. Arroyo of the 5th District of Negros Occidental, Governor Joseph G. Marañon of the province of Negros Occidental, Mayor Carminia G. Bascon of Himamaylan City, Asst. Sec. Ricardo Tan of the DOTC, Hon. Nicolas P. Lapeña, Chair of the board-PostalBank; Hon. Dario C. Rama, Postmaster General of the Philippine Postal Corp, Hon. Bituin V. Salcedo, OIC-Office of the President & CEO of PostalBank; and Members of the Board of PostalBank.

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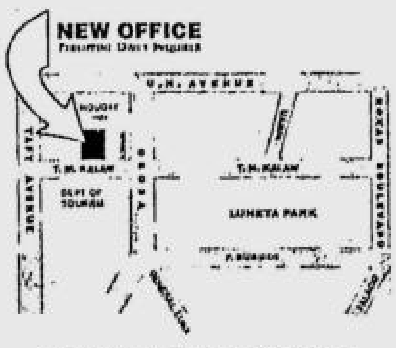

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REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
SECURITIES & EXCHANGE COMMISSION
SEC Building, EDSA, Greenhills
City of Mandaluyong, Metro Manila

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Securities and Exchange Commission, through its Bids and Awards Committee (BAC), invites qualified local bidders/contractors to apply for eligibility and to bid for the REPAIR AND RENOVATION OF SEC OFFICES at 3rd, 7th and 9th FLOORS SEC Building.

a. Duly licensed Filipino citizens/sole proprietorships; or
b. Partnership duly organized under the laws of the Philippines and of which at least seventy five percent (75%) of the interest belongs to citizens of the Philippines; or
c. Corporation duly organized under the laws of the Philippines, and of which at least seventy five percent (75%) of the outstanding capital stock belongs to citizen of the Philippines; or
d. Cooperatives duly registered with the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) and
e. Bidder/Contractor must be in construction business continuously for 10 years.

Bidders/contractors should have a valid and current License and Registration issued by PCAB.

License	at least "Category C"
Registration	at least "SMALL B"

Bidders should have a similar completed contract within a period of five (5) years and must be at least fifty percent (50%) of the approved budget of the contract to be bid.

The budgets for the Contract to be bid are as follows:

a.	3rd Floor	- Php 3,715,860.00
b.	7th Floor	- Php 2,685,870.00
c.	9th Floor	- Php 2,580,730.00

Application for Eligibility and Eligibility Forms will be available for issuance starting **January 13, 2005 to January 21, 2005** at the General Services Division, 4th Floor, SEC Building, EDSA, Greenhills, Mandaluyong City, upon presentation of PCAB license and a payment of a non-refundable fee of Five Hundred Pesos (P500.00).

Deadline for submission of Letter of Intent and opening of the Eligibility Envelope shall be on **January 24, 2005, 10:00 a.m.** at the Market Regulation Department (MRD) Conference Room, 6th Floor, SEC Building

A complete set of bidding documents may be obtained by the eligible bidder starting **January 25 to February 2, 2005** at the General Services Division, 4th Floor, SEC Building, EDSA, Greenhills, Mandaluyong City, upon payment of a non-refundable fee of **Two Thousand Five Hundred Pesos (P2,500.00)**. For further details, please contact Asst. Director Romeo O. Dauag at Tel. No. 727-3320.

Pre-Bid conference will be on **February 4, 2005, 10:00 a.m.** at the Market Regulation Department (MRD) Conference Room, 6th Floor, SEC Building

Deadline for submission and opening of Technical and Price Proposal will be on **February 16, 2005, 10:00 a.m.** at the Market Regulation Department (MRD) Conference Room, 6th Floor, SEC Building. Late submission and/or incomplete bid documents will no longer be accepted.

Republic Act 9184, and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) shall govern all particulars relative to Eligibility, Bid Bond, Pre-Bid Conference, Bid Evaluation, Post Qualification and Awards of Contracts.

The SEC reserves the right to reject any or all bids, to waive any required formalities therein and to award the contract to the bidder whose proposal as evaluated is most advantageous to the Commission

SEC also assumes no obligation whatsoever to compensate or indemnify the bidder for any expense or loss that may be incurred in the preparation of the bids, nor does it guarantee that any award will be made.

(Sgd.) **JOSE AQUINO**
Chairman
Bids and Awards Committee

(PDI–Jan. 13 & 20, 2005)

PRIVATIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OFFICE INVITATION TO SUBMIT OFFERS

The asset being offered through Offer from Sale, on an "as-is, where-is" basis, is a parcel of land with an area of 1,454 sq.m., more or less, located at 4812 Sampaguita St., Barangay Sun Valley, Parañaque City, formerly belonging to Delta Motors Corporation.

Indicative Price
P5,816,000.00

Offers will be received, opened and tabulated in the presence of the offerors on January 28, 2005 at 3:00 p.m. at the PMO Conference Room, 6th Floor, 104 Gamboa St., Legaspi Village, Makati City.

Interested parties may request for a duly authenticated copy of the sale documents for anominal fee of P500.00.

For more information, please call Ms. Melinda B. Cortez of the PMO Marketing Department at telephone numbers 892-2145 or 818-4733.

(PDI--Jan. 13, 14 & 15, 2004)

WHERE YOU FIND THE BEST. *Read it every Sunday with the Philippine Daily Inquirer and visit it online at www.jobmarket[illegible].com*

PHILIPPINE DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

NOTICE TO THE DEPOSITORS OF THE CLOSED RURAL BANK OF VINZONS, (Camarines Norte), INC.

1. The Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation (PDIC) will start its operations for the servicing of claims for insured deposits in the closed Rural Bank of Vinzons (Camarines Norte), Inc. (RBVI) on Wednesday, **January 12, 2005**.

2. Depositors are requested to proceed directly to the premises of the closed RBVI, the designated payoff site. PDIC representatives are stationed at the premises of the closed bank from **January 12 to 21, 2005** to accept claims and entertain queries of depositors during office hours from Monday to Friday.

   After the said date, all depositors can file their claims personally at the PDIC Claims Counter, 6th Floor, SSS BLDG, Ayala Avenue corner V.A. Rufino St., Makati City from Monday to Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. or by mail to:

   The Manager
   Claims Processing Department
   Philippine Deposit Insurance Corporation
   2228 Chino Roces Avenue
   1231 Makati City.

3. Depositors are advised to present the following requirements to the PDIC representatives when filing their claims.

   a. Original evidence of deposit such as Savings Passbook and/or Certificate of Time Deposit.
   b. Two (2) latest identification cards/documents (IDs) with depositor's signature.

   Other documents maybe required by the PDIC representatives in the course of their processing of claims filed.

4. Pursuant to the provision of R.A. 3591, as amended by R.A. 9302, the prescriptive date (last day) for filing claims for insured deposits in the closed Rural Bank of Vinzons (Camarines Norte), Inc. is **January 6, 2007**. After **January 6, 2007**, PDIC as insurer, shall no longer accept any claim for insured deposits maintained with the said closed bank.

PHILIPPINE DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

(PDI - Jan 12 & 13 2005)

LAND BANK OF THE PHILIPPINES

Ang Bangkong May Damdaming-Bayan
1598 M. H. del Pilar St. cor. Dr. J. Quintos St., Malate, Manila
Tel. Nos. 522-00-00; 526-01-00 connecting all departments

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The Land Bank of the Philippines invites interested suppliers who are (a) duly licensed Filipino citizens/sole proprietorships; or (b) 60% Filipino owned partnerships/corporations; or (c) two or more suppliers forming into joint ventures jointly and severally liable; or (d) cooperatives duly registered with the CDA; with largest single contract, similar to the items for bid, for the last 2 years, at least equal to 50% of the approved budget; and with Net Financial Contracting Capacity (NFCC) at least equal to the approved budget, to apply for eligibility and to bid for the following items:

ITB No.	Item / Description	Approved Budget	Source of Funds
2004-277 (2)	1 lot Two (2) Years Maintenance Service Agreement of 126 units IBM Diebold Automated Tellering Machine (ATMs).	P 10,584,000.00 (P3,500.00/ATM Machine/Month)	LBP Funds
2004-330	100 units Manual Embosser.	P 11,500,000.00	LBP Funds
2004-284	1 lot Supply and delivery of CISCO ROUTERS or EQUIVALENT (15 units CISCO 2621 XM ROUTERS) (35 units CISCO 1751-V ROUTERS) (30 units CISCO 1721 ROUTERS)	P 14,300,000.00	LBP Funds

Bidding of the above requirements is scheduled on February 9, 2005 at 1:00 p.m. and the Bid Documents may be obtained from the Procurement Division of the General Services Department, 25th Floor, LANDBANK Plaza, M. H. del Pilar corner Dr. Quintos Streets, Malate, Manila, upon payment of a non-refundable fee of P2,000.00 for each ITB.

Interested suppliers are requested to attend the Pre-Bid Conference scheduled on January 27, 2005 at the 25th Floor, Conference Room, LANDBANK Plaza, Malate, Manila.

All particulars relative to the Qualification/Eligibility, Bid Bond, Performance Bond, Pre-bid Conference, Bid Evaluation and Award of Contract shall be governed by the provisions of RA 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations.

Only those bidders who comply with the Bank's requirements shall be eligible to participate in the bidding.

LANDBANK reserves the right to reject any or all bids, to declare the bidding a failure or waive any defect or informality and to accept bids as may be considered most advantageous to the Bank.

COMMITTEE ON BIDS AND AWARDS

(PDI-Jan 13 & 20, 2005)

The jeweler of modern Filipinas

F&C Jewelry has been in the jewelry trade for decades and the company has witnessed, how in the past, housewives secretly purchased jewelry. Before, women had little career opportunities and most of them were mere housewives with little or no money. Back then, women brought their husband along so they could buy jewelry. Such was the paternalistic control over finances and independent jewelry purchases by women were rare.

In 1973, the Florete family of Iloilo City established the F&C Jewelry. The company grew modestly and it was only in the early 80's when it began expanding to nearby provinces. Today, the company has over 30 outlets that include several branches in SM Department Stores nationwide. On Dec. 8, F&C SM Delgado-Iloilo branch opened, an addition to the ever-growing chains of F&C.

Over the past three decades, Filipinas have distinguished themselves in every field and F&C Jewelry has observed how women have slowly gained more confidence and have gained the capacity to make independent jewelry purchases with their own money. Oftentimes, office girls and professional women buy jewelry. However, with the proliferation of credit cards, most jewelry transactions are purchased on credit and this explains why even high school students could buy jewelry with extension cards.

F&C Jewelry carries a fine line of Italian gold, Spanish gold, Japanese pearls, diamond and birthstone settings. Although many pieces are imported F&C also offers its own jewelry lines. In fact, some branches can take custom orders as well as accept jewelry for cleaning and repairs. The jewelry business involves a lot of trust and it is very personal. Reputation is very important for jewelry shops and referrals come only from very satisfied customers who have purchased an honest to goodness piece with the exact carats and fine craftsmanship.

Aside from the jewelry business, the Florete family is also engaged in pawnshop operations and some F&C outlets have pawnshops as well. This is another reason why accuracy in the carats of F&C jewelry pieces is important, so that even if a buyer pawns the jewelry the family's pawnshop operations will not be at a disadvantage.

While F&C Jewelry is attuned to the taste of Filipinas, the company regularly sends representatives to jewelry trade shows in Hong Kong, Singapore, and the US regularly. F&C experts believe that the international trend for jewelry is headed towards the art deco style - the vogue back in the 1920's and 30's. In fact, jewelry pieces in art deco designs are seen in numerous international fashion magazines. Accordingly, F&C shops carry impressive art deco rings and chains from Italy as well as pendants from Spain.

Since rings carry profound significance in relationships, F&C carries a venerable line of wedding and engagement rings in classic designs in yellow or white gold. Some outlets even offer engraving services to enhance the emotional value of the item.

With over 30 branches nationwide and decades of experience, no one understands the Filipinas' passion for jewelry the way F&C Jewelry does. Reward yourself or your loved ones, with the finest investment jewelry pieces from F&C Jewelry at SM Department Stores nationwide. F&C SM Delgado-Iloilo has recently opened. You may avail of the exciting promo discounts and new selections. Choose from a wide variety of pearl, diamond, and colored stone settings in yellow gold or white gold, and enjoy the reassuring feeling that you have purchased a long-term investment that can be worn to impress even the most jaded of friends and relatives.

YSA SKIN CARE CENTER OPENS IN SM CITY-BAGUIO

Ysa Skin Care Center, the foremost dermatological clinic in the country, recently opened its newest clinic in SM City-Baguio. The Zen-inspired clinic features eight consultation and treatment rooms and dedicated IPL Photorejuvenation and Diamond Peeling machines. Present during the inauguration were: Joy Conanan, Ysa Skin Care brand manager; Vangie Serafin, Ysa Skin Care Center operations manager; Ricky elasco, NSA regional sales manager for North Luzon.

the CMM Level 3 Assessment

WESERV PASSES CMM LEVEL 3 ASSESSMENT

WeServ Systems Int'l Inc (WeServ), a wholly owned subsidiary of Fujitsu Phils, has recently passed the assessment for Capability Maturity Model for Software (SW-CMM) done by SQME Professionals Inc and has been rated at CMM Level 3. This is a major milestone in WeServ's continuing quest for best quality software practices. WeServ is also an ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management System certified organization. WeServ has offices in the Philippines, US, UK, and Japan. Shown are (from left): Hiromi Suzawa, WeServ FJ business manager; Basilio Lasco, WeServ FJ business director; Linda Navarro, WeServ operations support director; Neneth Gevaña, WeServ president and CEO; Joselyn Capistrano, SQME's lead assessor; Noriaki Komori, WeServ FJ business manager, and Arthur Tesoro, SQME assessor.

Worldclass security at Harbour Centre

SECURITY at the Harbour Centre Port Terminal is worldclass.

A recent government certification affirms that Harbour Centre conforms to international standards on port security.

Effective for two years, the certificate issued by the Office for Transportation Security (OTS) specifically attests to Harbour Centre's compliance with the provisions of Chapter XI-2 and part A of the International Code for the Security of Ships and Port Facilities (ISPS).

The OTS certificate makes Harbour Centre the country's first and only private commercial port to become ISPS compliant.

The ISPS code is a mandatory measure adopted by the Philippines as a member state of the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The ISPS is designed to ensure the implementation of adequate security measures on board Philippine-registered ships and in Philippine ports and shipyards, and enhance the level of security awareness and emergency preparedness among their owners/operators, officers and crew, port users, workers, and passengers.

The two-year certification was issued to Harbour Centre recently after it had been given a six-month interim compliance certificate in July last year.

Harbour Centre is the biggest and the first and only private commercial port in the country.

Other privately-owned ports are not operating commercially.

The rest of the country's ports are owned either by the national government or by the local government units, but mostly run by private operators under service agreements.

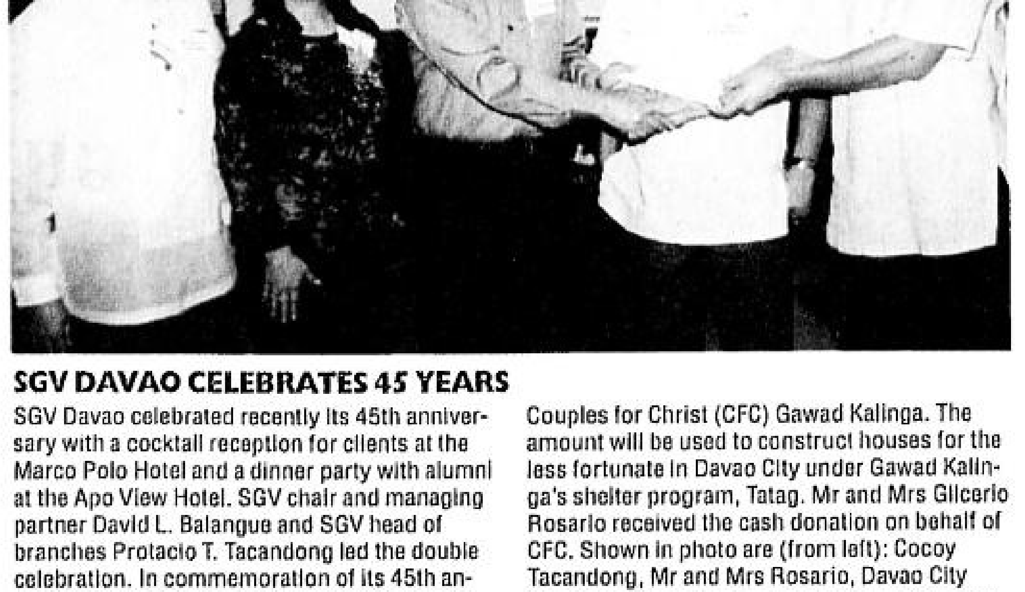
On the other hand, Harbour Centre is both owned and operated by private firm Harbour Centre Port Terminal Inc, which has developed its 10-hectare port into a modern and state-of-the-art facility that has substantially decongested the Port of Manila by virtually expanding its total capacity.

Unlike the other Manila ports, all owned by the Philippine Ports Authority (PPA), Harbour Centre boasts a solid concrete wharf wi pier-side loading and unloading of cargo, 50-meter-wide roads for container and cargo traffic, vast break-bulk and bulk cargo and container yards, large fleet of forklifts and other modern equipment, pneumatic conveyors for direct ship-to-silo and spillage-free conveyance of grains and pollution-free handling of cement, and other high-tech facilities in a fully environment-friendly landscape.

And with its much cheaper rates, better services and facilities, and faster turnaround time, Harbour Centre now poses a strong competition to the PPA's antiquated ports.

SCHERING PHILIPPINE CORP'S LITERACY CAMPAIGN

Schering Philippine Corp through the Sa Aklat Sisikat Foundation (SAS) recently donated books and gave gifts for students of the Tibagan Public Elementary School in Makati. This literacy campaign is a springboard for an extensive corporate social responsibility program that Schering Philippine Corp is undertaking for its 40th anniversary in 2005. Present were (from left) Fertility Control Group product manager Allan Jay Rodriguez, Fertility Control product manager Cyndy Galimpin, teachers Susana Tabbad and Rose Espiritu Santo, Hormone Therapy Group product manager Cety Quetula, SAS executive director Ma. Teresa de Villa and SAS associate Melvyn Isidro.



SGV DAVAO CELEBRATES 45 YEARS

SGV Davao celebrated recently its 45th anniversary with a cocktail reception for clients at the Marco Polo Hotel and a dinner party with alumni at the Apo View Hotel. SGV chair and managing partner David L. Balangue and SGV head of branches Protacio T. Tacandong led the double celebration. In commemoration of its 45th anniversary, SGV Davao donated P200,000 to the Couples for Christ (CFC) Gawad Kalinga. The amount will be used to construct houses for the less fortunate in Davao City under Gawad Kalinga's shelter program, Tatag. Mr and Mrs Gilcerio Rosario received the cash donation on behalf of CFC. Shown in photo are (from left): Cocoy Tacandong, Mr and Mrs Rosario, Davao City Vice Mayor Luis Bongoyan, and Dave Balangue.

Bits & Clips

Swinging for a cause

THE AMCHAM Foundation ChariTee Golf Tournament is set on Jan. 14 at the Manila Southwoods Golf and Country Club. Each tournament ticket costs P4,000 and includes green fees, caddie fees, buffet breakfast and lunch giveaways and a chance to win door prizes. Ladies have a special ticket rate of P3,500. Bring some extra cash and join the raffle. Ford Group Phils is this year's Emerald Sponsor for the Amcham Charitee Golf Tournament. For more information, contact Nadia at 829-4308, or Juvy at 834-0184, 551-8060.

Philips' Best of Europe 2

THE GRAND draw for Philips' Best of Europe 2 will be moved from Jan. 14 to Jan. 17. Philips Consumer Electronics will raffle off a brand new BMW 316i; tour packages to Amsterdam, Paris and London; and Prada and Salvatorre Ferragamo gift checks worth P50,000. Also to be given away are Philips Pixel Plus 2 TVs, Omega Constellation watches and other Philips audio-video appliances. The winners of the best of Europe 2 promo will be selected from text message (SMS) entries sent during the promo period by consumers who purchased Philips audio-video products before Dec. 30, 2004.

Eastwood's City-Wide Sale

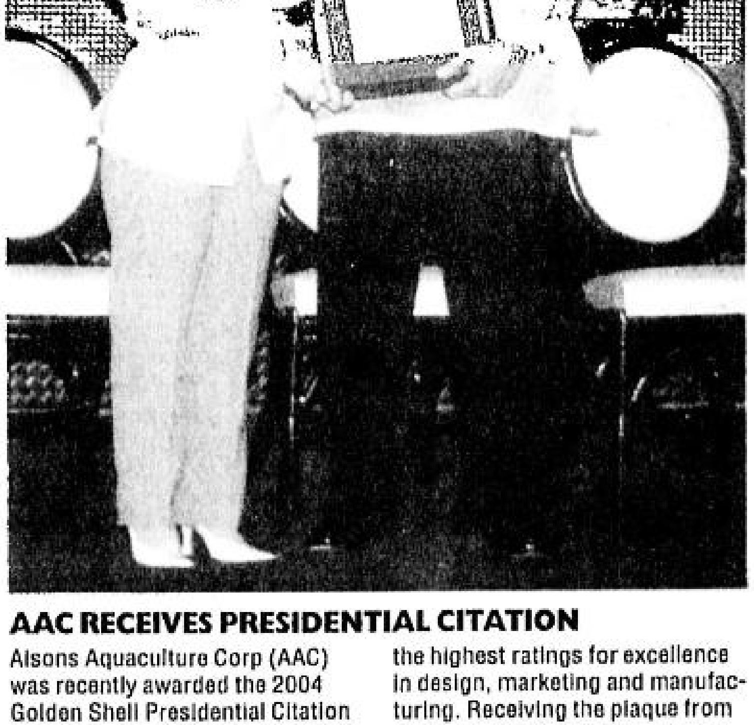
COME to Eastwood City, Libis, Quezon City on Jan. 14, 15 and 16 and greet the new year with a shopping bang at the Eastwood City-Wide Sale. Enjoy 10 to 70 percent discount from all of Eastwood City's 100 retail shops and restaurants and make this weekend something to remember for the rest of the year. Say hello to new fashion items, furniture, gears, music extravaganzas, dining concepts, and new experience in bargain shopping on this three-day all out blow-out that can only happen at Eastwood City. Go on a shopping spree and pig-out on the most delicious dishes cooked up at Eastwood City. Pay less and get the best for this season.

'Circulate @ 88'

MALATE Catholic School will hold its Grand Alumni Homecoming on Feb. 5, Saturday, at 4 p.m. at the Jaime Cardinal Sin Gymnasium, Madre Ignacia, Malate, Manila. Week-long activities starting on Jan. 31, include art exhibits, golf and badminton tournaments, school tours and the Alumni Awards Night. The event is entitled "Circulate @ 88" because the school is celebrating its 88th year. Graduates of milestone years 1955,1960,1965,1970,1975,1980,1985 and 1995 are specially invited to participate in the celebration. Malateans should call the alumni office at telephone numbers 521-1451, 400-0278 or text at 0917-8910457. You can also visit the website for more information at www.mcsaaf.org.

PIZZA OF CHAMPIONS

San Beda Red Cubs team captain and star player, Rogemar Menor celebrates their team's championship in the junior basketball division of the NCAA with a Shakey's Giant Pizza. Shakey's continues to give you great food, great service, great value, great service because "Nothing Shakes like Shakey's". For those who would rather stay in than eat out, a Shakey's meal is just a phone call away, just dial 533-8000.



AAC RECEIVES PRESIDENTIAL CITATION

Alsons Aquaculture Corp (AAC) was recently awarded the 2004 Golden Shell Presidential Citation in ceremonies held in Malacañang. The award cited AAC's Sarangani Bay Prime Bangus for achieving the highest ratings for excellence in design, marketing and manufacturing. Receiving the plaque from President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is AAC executive vice president and COO Alex Alcantara.

LIFESTYLE

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REGGIE Aspiras
on her mom and food
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Feast of clay

Text by Vangie Baga-Reyes
Photos by Jim Guiao Punzalan

COOKING in a clay pot is one of the oldest cooking techniques in the world. It has been around at least since the Roman times of western civilization.

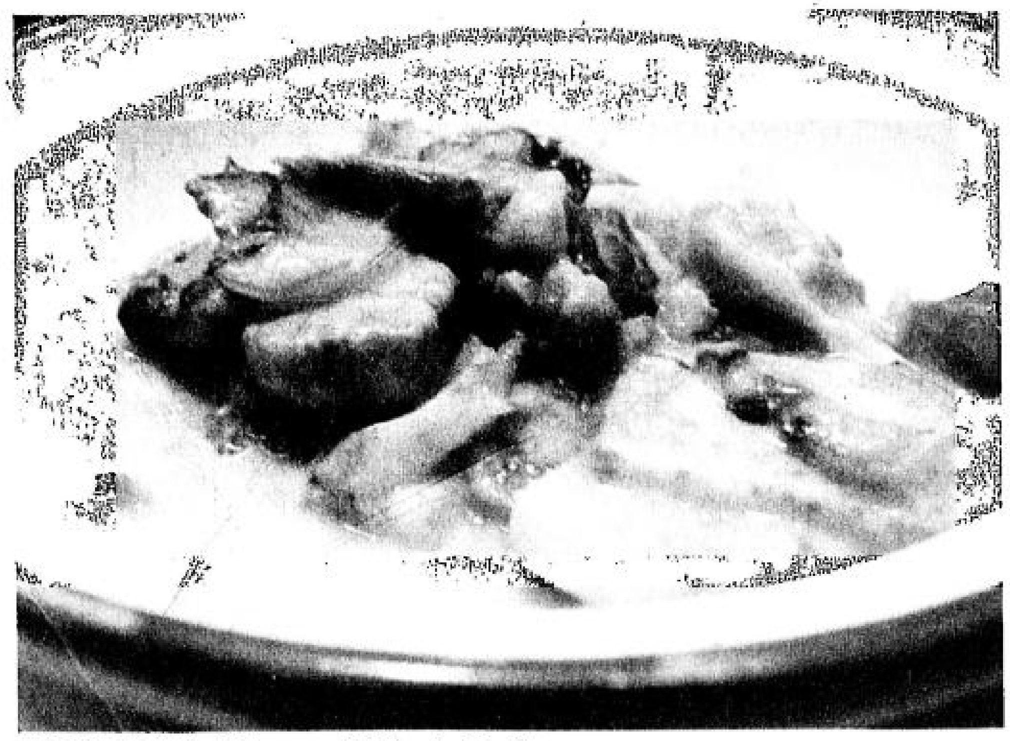
In Asia, many of China's wonderful dishes have always been traditionally prepared in clay pots.

Clay-pot dishes are the Chinese version of the American casserole. The main difference, however, is that they are cooked on top of the stove rather than in the oven.

The design of the clay pot assures good retention of heat, so that even if dinner is delayed, the food stays piping hot.

The Mandarin Oriental, Manila (tel. 7508888) is holding a gastronomic clay pot food festival until Jan. 23 to offer locals the best of Chinese cuisine traditionally prepared and served in clay pots. The festival is being held at the hotel's Tin Hau restaurant on the second floor.

Executive Chinese chef Tin Ming Hui (a.k.a. Sam) has whipped up an array of favorite clay-pot dishes, from beef to chicken, fish, pork, duck, eel and frog legs, cooked Cantonese style. Cantonese cuisine uses a great many flavors, all of which are enhanced by the clay-pot cooking method.

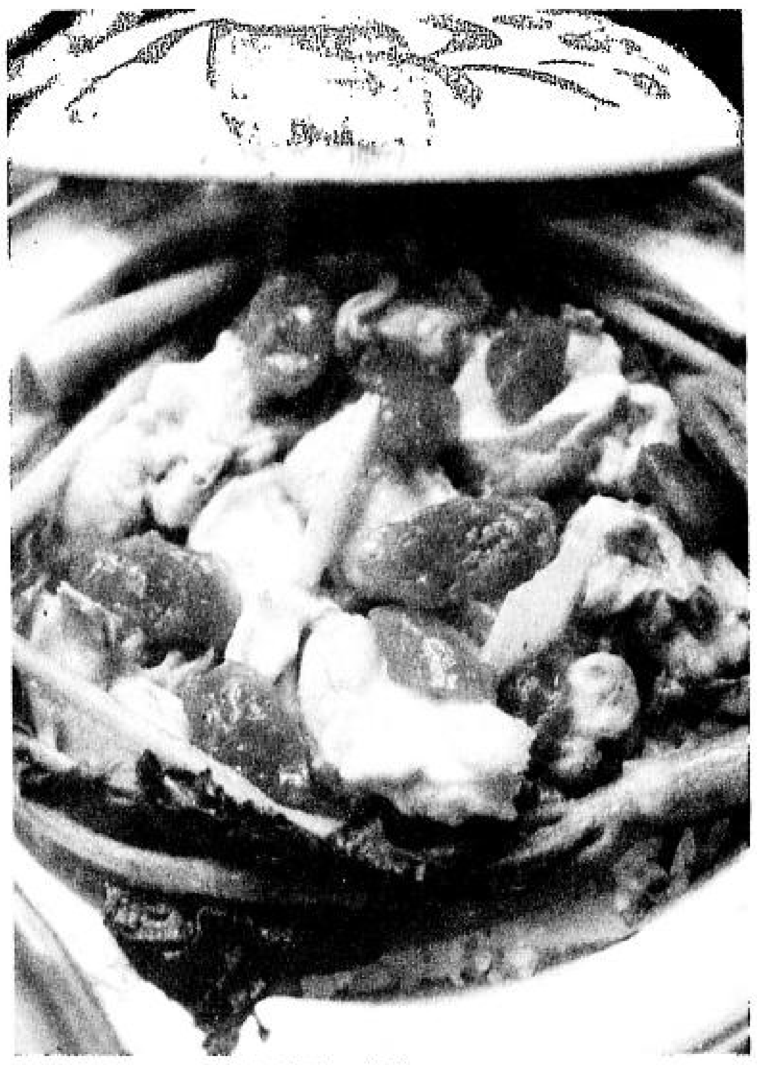

SALTED Duck, Pork Sausage with Taro in Clay Pot

"Clay pots are used largely in China because it's a piece of cookware that distributes heat evenly in its interior," says Sam. "It produces delicious, moist foods in which the flavors mingle, with little fat."

Exceptional clay pot

For its clay-pot dishes, Tin Hau uses imported cookware made from exceptional clay that withstands direct flame or direct contact with an electric burner. The clay pots produce rich, concentrated, slow-cooked, braised or stewed dishes.

"Clay-pot cooking also produces good roasted meats due to the additional moisture from soaking, and gives dishes additional crispiness and deeper browning," Sam says.


CHINESE Sausage with Chicken in Rice

Among the rich selection of clay-pot dishes is the Pan-fried Eel and Pork Lechon with Brown Sauce in Clay Pot (P560). The eel has a nice flaky texture. It has its own gamy flavor that separates it from other seafood. The dish comes with a rich, thick brown sauce.

The flavorful Braised Wu Xi Spareribs in Clay Pot (P420) has a cherry-colored sauce flavored with fish sauce and a "secret" Chinese ingredient. The meat is carefully arranged in a clay pot and gently braised.

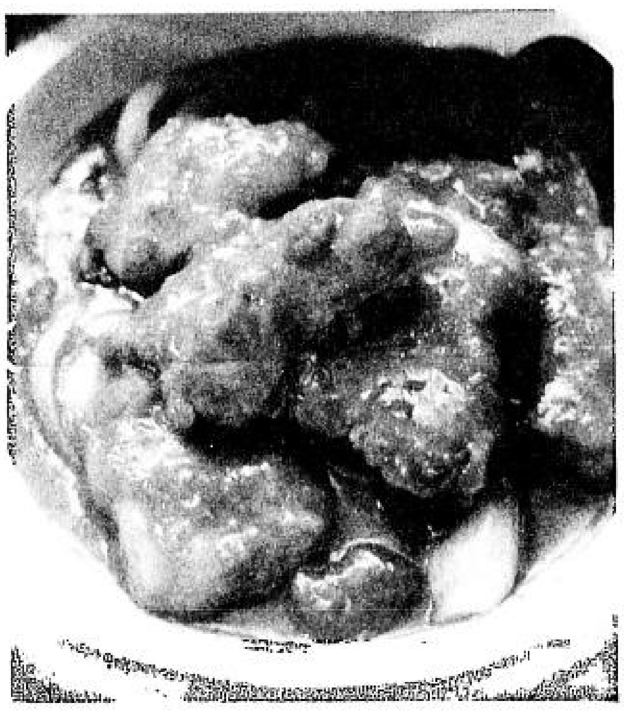
The fish dishes are similarly flavorful. The Pan-fried Salmon Fish Head (P360) is cooked with leeks and ginger in clay pot.

But the potential biggest crowd-pleaser is the Salted Duck, Pork Sausage with Taro in Clay Pot (P420). It consists of slices of duck meat and sausage and taro cooked in coconut milk.

Sam has also prepared hot-pot dishes with rice, including Dried Chinese Duck in Rice (P400) and Chinese Sausage with Chicken in Rice (P400).

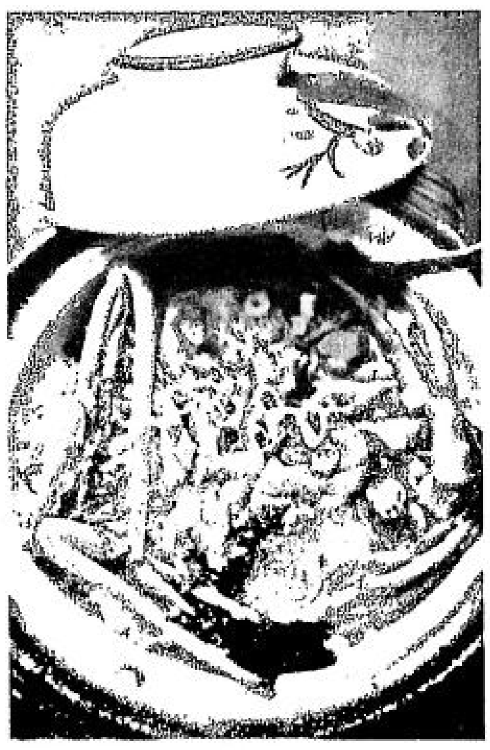
The preparation of food in a time-honored manner is something that should interest every food lover. The Mandarin Oriental beckons.

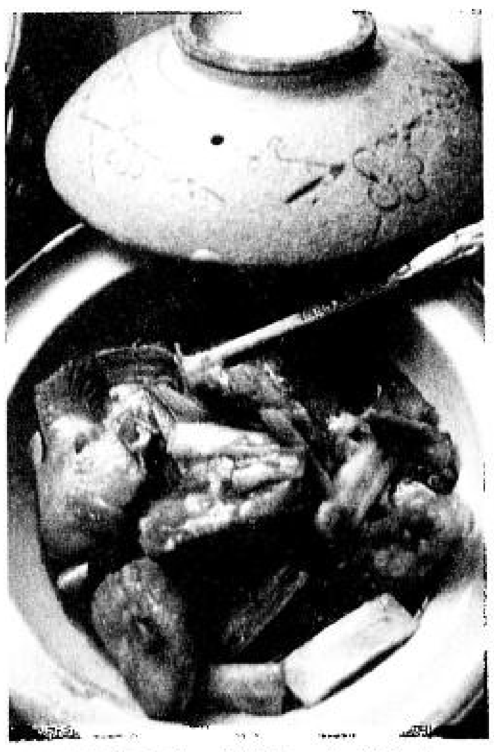
E-mail the author at vbaga@inquirer.com.ph

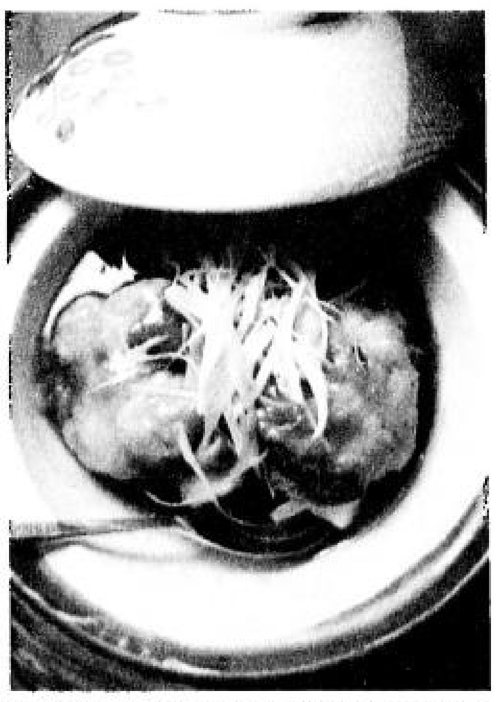


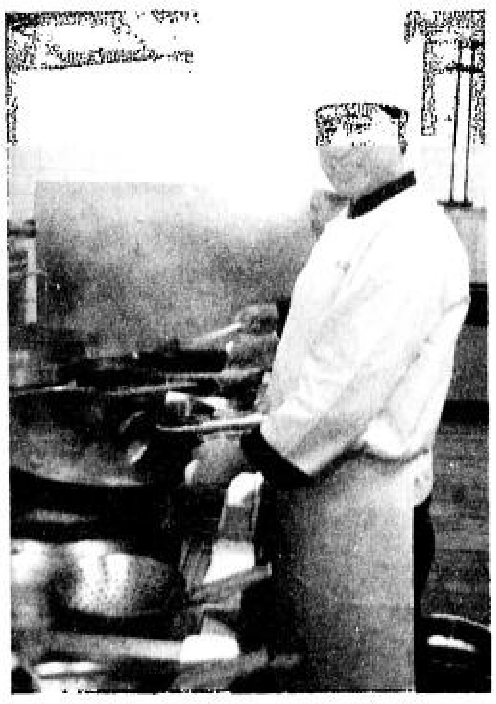
The Mandarin Oriental celebrates flavorful clay-pot cooking

BRAISED Wu Xi Spareribs in Clay Pot


DRIED Chinese Duck in Rice


PAN-FRIED Salmon Fish Head with Leeks and Ginger in Clay Pot


PAN-FRIED Eel and Pork Lechon with Brown Sauce in Clay Pot


MANDARIN Oriental Manila executive Chinese chef Tin Ming Hui

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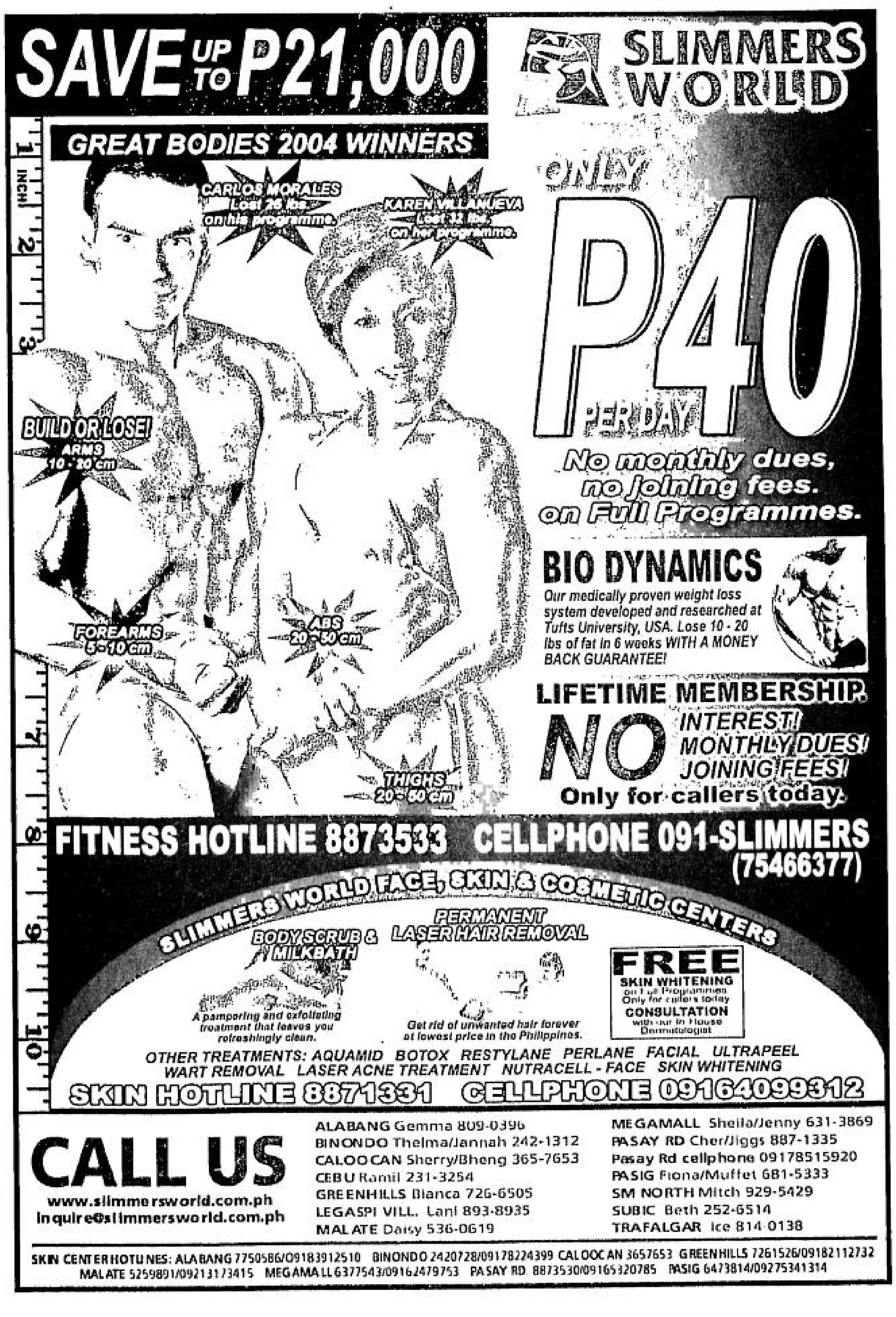
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CARLOS MORALES Lost 26 lbs. on his programme.
KAREN VILLANUEVA Lost 32 lbs. on her programme.
BUILD OR LOSE! ARMS 10 - 20 cm
FOREARMS 5 - 10 cm
ABS 20 - 50 cm
THIGHS 20 - 50 cm
INCH 1 2 3 7 8 9 10

Nightmare on Morato Street

THE CONSUMER

Marietta Velasco Giron

WE commiserate with residents of Tomas Morato Street who have to live with the noise of bars and discos, not to mention chaotic traffic and the coming and going of vehicles belonging to customers of the various establishments.

Not too long ago, this street was a homeowner's paradise.

Well, it's no longer that, according to resident Julian Rodriguez (jurod@hotmail.com), whose letter gives an idea of how it is now to live in this highly commercialized zone of Quezon City. He lives in a busy area around the new Forum Building.

"Noise pollution in my place is horrible particularly at around 10 p.m. when we start hearing the (magnified) boom-boom sound from one of the establishments in the building. The loud music, particularly on weekends, can last up to 5:30 a.m. Needless to say, sleeping is impossible.

"In addition to that, infernal noises coming from the booming stereo systems at the workers' sleeping quarters of Wan Chai restaurant make life miserable for us."

Rodriguez added that another cause of aggravation to residents was the coming and going of customers' vehicles that were parked at their properties. "They encroach on our parking space. Moreover, they pollute the air we breathe. It's also a problem getting in and out of our gate, especially when the customers don't park their vehicles properly," he wrote.

"We have repeatedly called the attention of our barangay officers since March when the establishments in our area started operating. Very little... has changed."

Calling on Mayor Sonny Belmonte to implement the law on public nuisance.

Shortchanging consumers

Last weekend, an irate consumer sent us a complaint against business establishments that don't give customers their exact change. It's a timely concern as Senator Manny Villar is filing Senate Bill 649, also known as "Exact Change Act" that will require business establishments to give customers their exact change in the form of money, no less. When passed, violation of the act will be considered a trade malpractice and punishable.

Here's the complaint from the concerned consumer: "I am fed up with business establishments that do not give you your exact change. And worse, some cashiers do not even bother to tell you that your change is (short of a few cents). Why is it that cashiers seem to run out of 10 and five centavo coins all the time?

"Last week, for example, a cashier of Hi-Top supermarket was supposed to give me P5.65 in change, but she only handed me P5.50. If these cashiers cannot give their customers the exact change, then I suggest that store owners (round off) their prices... (so) cashiers (will not have a) problem with loose change."

Traffic obstruction

From our friend Anneth Ng Lim of Citibank: "I saw another one of these slow-moving trucks carrying a billboard of AIG *dolce vita* card along Edsa during the rush hour. Don't they violate traffic rules?"

We are sure these slow-moving mobile billboards violate certain traffic rules considering there are specified speed limits for thoroughfares. They are certainly traffic obstructions, and they distract the attention of other drivers, as well.

Speaking of billboards, our legislators should file a bill that will ensure the structural safety of imposing structures. Consider our suggestions: electrical wiring should be insulated to prevent electrocution, barriers should be in place to prevent unauthorized individuals from scaling the structure, materials should be fireproof; structure should be sound and reinforced to withstand the forces of nature, etc.

We end this column with a note of praise and appreciation for all the help we received when we couldn't write our articles because our computer was hacked with a virus.

Our thanks to Val Hilario, IT specialist of a consumer product company, publicist Bob Manzano, and Julie Ann Sanchez, technical support of Tridel Technologies.

E-mail the author at mariettagiron@hotmail.com.

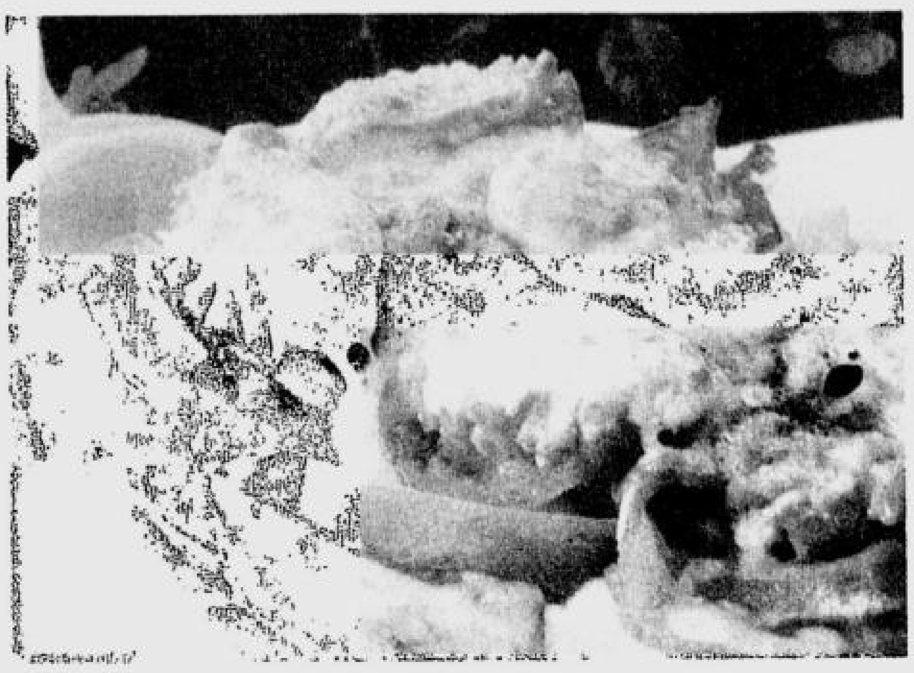
Showcase of Sweden's classic country cooking

DINING OUT

MANDARIN Oriental Manila presents "Distinctly Swedish" until Jan. 15 at Captain's Bar. Guest chef Andreas Balla prepares Graved Lax with Dill-Mustard Sauce; Swedish Meatballs with Cranberry Sauce; Veal Stew with Dill; Wallenbergsare Veal Frikadelle; Nordic Profiteroles with Creme Bavaroise; Biff a la Lindstrom Beef Frikadelle with Beetroot and Capers; Poached Cod in Egg-Parsley Sauce; Swedish Pancakes with Strawberries and Whipped Cream; and Swedish Apple Pie with Vanilla Sauce. Call 7508888.

CIRCLES Event Cafe features cold cuts and salads, Asian cuisine, steaks, pizza and pasta, sushi and sashimi, halo-halo, chocolate pralines, freshly baked breads, cakes and a chocolate fountain. Circles Event Cafe is located at the lobby of Makati Shangri-La. Call 8138888.

PIZZA HUT Bistro offers a wide array of appetizers, pasta choices, signature dishes, dessert and coffee concoctions. The bistro is located at the upper G/F Gateway Mall, Araneta Center, Quezon City.



UCC'S Sausage and Bacon Pizza Toast puts together choice cuts of meaty delights mixed with slices of green bell pepper and onion. Portions of sausage and bacon are placed on top of Japanese bread spread with thick tomato pizza sauce. It has a generous serving of mozzarella cheese and sprinkling of aromatic herbs. Also take pleasure in Sardines Pizza Toast or Vegetable Pizza Toast. UCC coffee shops are located at Tomas Morato, Quezon City; Connecticut St., Greenhills; The Podium, Ortigas Center; Forbes Town Center, The Fort; and Paseo Center, Makati.

SULO Hotel presents its Cake of the Month, Praline Cake. Made of soft walnut sponge and praline butter cream, this cake is offered at 50 percent off until Jan. 31. Its Dish of the Month, Chicken Teriyaki, is available until Jan. 31 at Sushi Bar and Teppanyaki Restaurant. Call 9245051.

Nutritious 'survival' recipes

MAYA Kitchen's "Survival Cooking Recipes" on Jan. 15, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., offers ideas on how to prepare nutritious filling dishes in 60 minutes or less.

Learn how to make Hot and Sour Chicken Soup, Vegetable Tofu Soup, Oriental Chicken Salad, Baked Eggplant with Yogurt, Chicken Fruit and Pasta Salad, Carbonara, Superslaw and Waldorf Salad, Fishballs in Pesto Sauce, Beef Quesadillos, Fish Cacciatore Bacalao Style and Ginger Flan. Participants will get a free Survival Cooking book.

Also on Jan. 15, 1:30-5 p.m., is a session on "Bestseller Sandwiches." Learn Recipe Formulation, Dressing and Plating with lecture on Proper Storing of Vegetables to increase shelf life and handling. Create great sandwiches like Pastrami, Roast Beef a la Shawarma, Herbed Chicken, Clubhouse and Vegetarian.

Learn baking basics in "Cake Decorating (Basic)," on Jan. 15-22, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. The lecture-workshop will cover the fundamentals of cake decorating, coloring, designing, template, icing (boiled, butter, caramel, chocolate, sugar icing), basic borders, jelly lettering, basic flower making and bunching.

Visit the Maya Kitchen (Tuesday-Saturday), 8/F, Liberty Building, A. Arnaiz Avenue (formerly Pasay Road), Makati City, or call 8921185 or 8925011 local 108 or e-mail mkitchen@ultimate.info.com.ph.

Stew, roll and roast

THE REGGIE Aspiras School of Culinary Arts will conduct the following classes:

Jan. 14: Oriental Stews (all new)—Delicious Coca Cola Stew with Leeks, Thai Beef Stew with Chili Sauce, Ox-tail and Tamarind Stew, Nonya Style Duck Stew, Oriental Chicken with Mushrooms

Jan. 15: The Best Cinnamon Rolls Ever—Two versions of melt-in-your-mouth cinnamon roll doughs--classic and variations: with cream cheese topping, chocolate, apple, citrus poppy seed, sticky buns

Jan. 17: Everyday Chicken (all new)—Lemon Chicken, Chicken with Basil, Kung Pao Chicken, Lemon Grass Chicken, Chicken with Pan Gravy and Mushroom Butter Rice, Pandan Chicken with Homemade Sweet Chili Sauce; side dishes

Jan. 19: United States Department of Agriculture Beef and California Wine Promotion. Learn how to roast the most unusual beef cuts—delicious and far cheaper than your regular roast cuts; ways with Angus beef belly, top blade and hanger tender; roasting, grilling, stewing; eight delicious beef recipes; soup, salad and side dishes; wine appreciation.

Call 9289296, 9273008, 6335162 or 0917-8399888.

Mom's birthday leads to discovery ...

From page C4

table cloth, charcoal griller, chafing dishes, gravy on heated boats, even floodlights if you're having the event in your garden, as we did. A properly geared grill master by the name of Randy cooked our beef according to the way each one of us wanted it.

The part I loved best was that it was extremely reasonable at P450 a kilo! If you ask me, this will remain a party staple for many years to come! Call 9265647 or 9265664 to order. Minimum order is five kilos.

And since this is all about my mom, I asked her to answer your recipe requests for *binagoongang baboy* and the perfect *guisadong gulay*. These recipes bring back memories of my childhood—great tasting comfort foods like no one but she could prepare!

AMPARO Aspiras

Soggy veggie

I would like to know how to cook vegetables properly. My cook and I don't seem to know how to do it, [the vegetables are] always tasteless and soggy. Any tips for everyday cooks and moms like me?

ZENY

Mom has the same problem with her cooks. Sounds simple but not a lot of people can do delicious *lutong-bahay* veggies. And if you have a mom like mine who requires each major food group to be represented at every meal—with each "representative" cooked to perfection—then you have the assurance that her version is perfect!

I learned this from her and it works like a charm, every time! Her technique can be applied to a wide variety of vegetables that the only thing I left out was the *bahay kubo*!

2 c vegetables sliced evenly— uniform slicing ensures that vegetables evenly cook at the same time (*sayote*, broccoli, cabbage, winged beans, Baguio beans, *chicharo*, *togue*, cauliflower, *pechay*, *upo*, *patola*...)

150 g shrimps, peeled, reserve shrimp heads (Mom uses small shrimps for this)

shrimp heads + 1/3-1/2 c water

50 g pork *liempo*, thinly sliced, optional (Mom hardly uses it)

3 tbsp oil

3 tbsp garlic, chopped

¼ c onions, chopped

2 tsp *bagoong balayan* (optional)

salt and pepper to taste

patis to taste

Pound shrimp heads in a mortar, add 1/3 c water, mix with a spoon or pestle, gently pressing on the shrimp heads to extract juice. Drain. Set aside.

Heat up oil. Saute garlic and onion. Add pork, brown slightly. Add shrimps. When shrimp changes color add vegetables and shrimp water. Season to taste with *bagoong*, salt, pepper and *patis*.

Remember to keep an eye on the veggies, you want them half cooked, still retaining their natural color.

'Mellow binagoongan'

Can I request for a simple yet delicious *binagoongang baboy* recipe? I don't like it too overpowering. I live in California and only have the weekends to cook. I know that it freezes well. All the best to you!

J ENRIQUEZ
SF, CA

Mom's *binagoongan* starts off like her *adobo*. She adds the *bagoong* toward the end. Simple and delicious! Just the way you like it! Aha! Aha! Okay, corny, sorry... Couldn't help it!

1 k pork *liempo*, cubed 1" x 1"

1 head Ilokos garlic, peeled and slightly pounded

3-4 tbsp vinegar (Datung Puti is okay)

1 tsp whole peppercorns

water

1-2 tbsp *bagoong alamang*, not sweet

1-2 pcs green chili, *pang-sigang*, sliced

Heat up a heavy saucepan. When pan is hot, drop pork pieces into the pan. Cook until meat turns light golden brown.

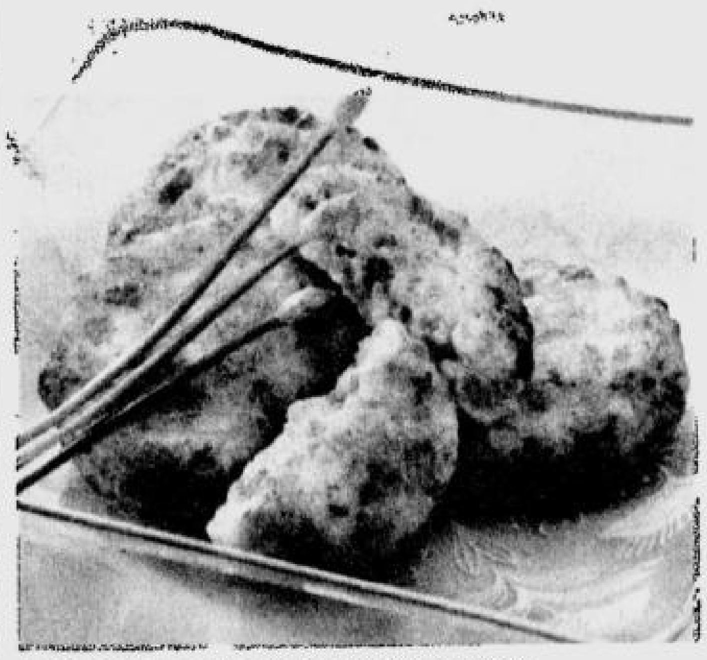
Add garlic, peppercorns. Saute for a few minutes. Add vinegar and scrape the bits stuck to the bottom of the pan.

Add water just enough to cover/submerge the meat. Bring mixture to a boil and simmer over lowest possible heat until pork is soft. Add *bagoong* and chilies and let simmer for 10 minutes.

See last week's KR *adobo* recipe for a more thorough procedure.

We love you Mom, happy birthday! Thank you for loving us, your imperfect children, so perfectly!

For comments or suggestions, text 0917-8399888.



POTATO Cakes with Luncheon Meat and Chives

Herbs for a healthy new year

EXPLORE the many varieties of herbs and enjoy its wonderful, exotic flavors while getting some health benefits as well.

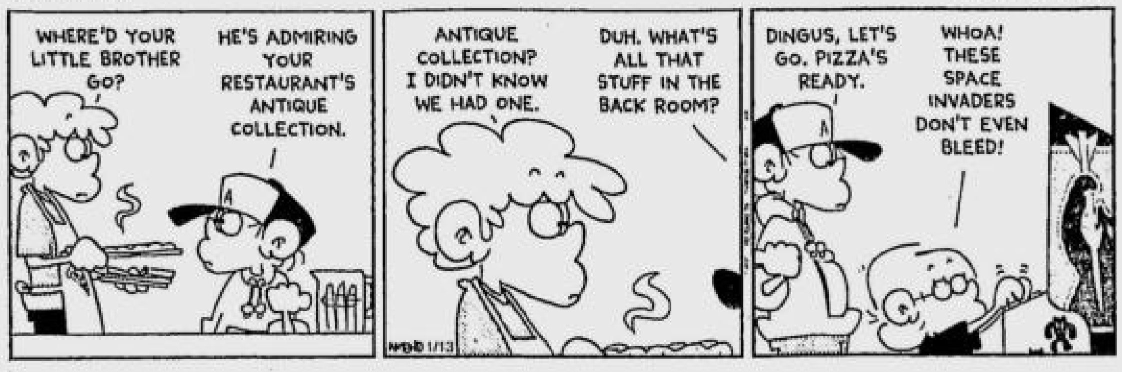
The San Miguel Purefoods Culinary Center offers easy, delicious recipes using herbs. Try the Potato Cakes with Purefoods Luncheon Meat and Chives. For a light lunch, have the Tagaytay.

Greens with Herbed Magnolia Cream Cheese Dressing. A hearty rice-topping meal is the Star Garlic Rice with Shrimps and Cilantro. For an Italian snack, there is the Chicken Basil Panini.

For more recipe ideas and a schedule of culinary events, visit www.mygreatfood.com.

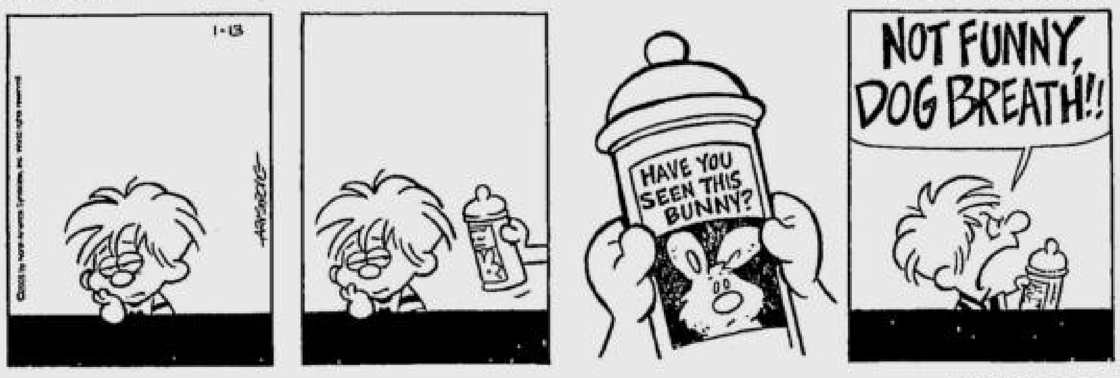
FOXTROT

BY BILL AMEND


WHERE'D YOUR LITTLE BROTHER GO?
HE'S ADMIRING YOUR RESTAURANT'S ANTIQUE COLLECTION.
ANTIQUE COLLECTION? I DIDN'T KNOW WE HAD ONE.
DUH. WHAT'S ALL THAT STUFF IN THE BACK ROOM?
DINGUS, LET'S GO. PIZZA'S READY.
WHOA! THESE SPACE INVADERS DON'T EVEN BLEED!
AMEND 1/13

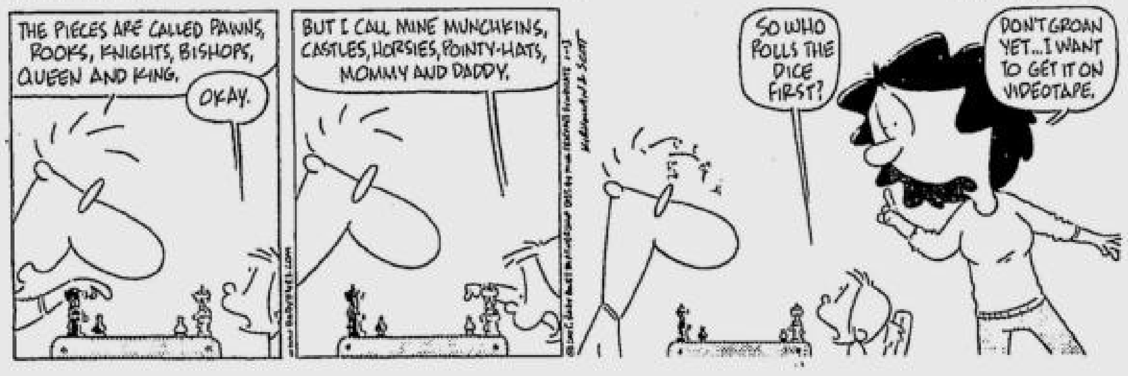
MARVIN

BY TOM ARMSTRONG


1-13
ARMSTRONG
HAVE YOU SEEN THIS BUNNY?
NOT FUNNY, DOG BREATH!!

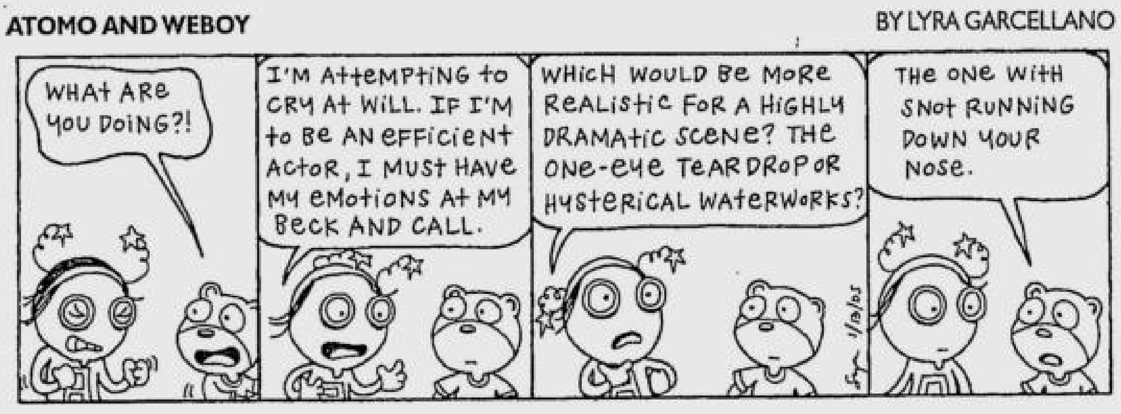
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


THE PIECES ARE CALLED PAWNS, ROOKS, KNIGHTS, BISHOPS, QUEEN AND KING.
OKAY.
BUT I CALL MINE MUNCHKINS, CASTLES, HORSIES, POINTY-HATS, MOMMY AND DADDY.
SO WHO ROLLS THE DICE FIRST?
DON'T GROAN YET... I WANT TO GET IT ON VIDEOTAPE.

ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO


WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
I'M ATTEMPTING TO CRY AT WILL. IF I'M TO BE AN EFFICIENT ACTOR, I MUST HAVE MY EMOTIONS AT MY BECK AND CALL.
WHICH WOULD BE MORE REALISTIC FOR A HIGHLY DRAMATIC SCENE? THE ONE-EYE TEARDROP OR HYSTERICAL WATERWORKS?
THE ONE WITH SNOT RUNNING DOWN YOUR NOSE.
1/13/05

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

YOU BORN TODAY: You enjoy a position of status, respect and esteem, regardless of your beginnings in life. You like to be upwardly mobile. (You value security.) You have a hardy enthusiasm for life. People like your attitude. Your optimism inspires others. A major choice awaits you this year. Choose wisely.
Birthdate of: Orlando Bloom, actor; Stephen Hendry, snooker champion; Julia Louis-Dreyfus, actress.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): This is not a good day to buttonhole your boss about anything. In fact, avoid bosses and authority figures just for today, because they might squelch you. Ugh.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): Don't be discouraged if travel plans or something connected with publishing is suddenly in the toilet. This is a temporary setback. Be patient; things will right themselves soon.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): Today, you might be disappointed by the lack of generosity from someone. Or your share of something might be disappointing. In the long run, things will get better.

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): Conversations with close friends and partners are stilted and frustrating today. People are holding back for some reason. Just be gentle and understanding. Don't expect too much.

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): It's a bit of a grind at work today. Your boss might be grumpy. Cooperation from others is limited. These things happen at times; we all know this. Just be patient.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): You might feel the burden of responsibility for children today. Or someone older might be giving you advice about children. You might also be self-critical about creative projects. (Don't be.)

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): Conversations with family members, especially parents, do not flow easily today. Choose another day for important discussions. Success always needs the right timing.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): You seem to be worried about something today. And on top of this, you're self-critical for some reason. Cut this out. It serves no purpose other than to make you miserable. You don't need this.

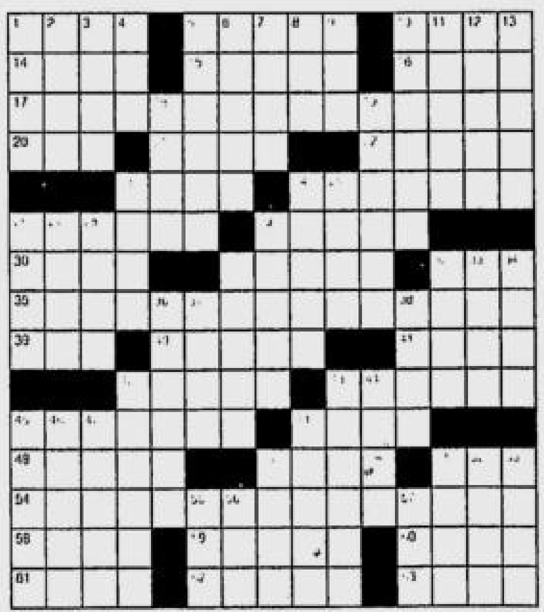
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Avoid financial deals today. It's also not a great day to shop. Somehow, you'll feel broke or blocked by others. Just relax and wait till another day when you feel more optimistic.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): You might feel discouraged in discussions with others. Either you feel inadequate or you wonder if people question your judgment. (It's just the stars today.)

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): You might hear somebody say something that embodies the very worst fears you have about yourself. Don't take this to heart. This is just a passing dark cloud on your horizon.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Friends might be critical today. If so, avoid them. Someone more experienced or older than you could make you feel diminished.

DAILY CROSSWORD



By Diane C. Baldwin
Columbia, MD

1/13/05

ACROSS
1 Open a little
5 Fritter away
10 Nave's neighbor
14 Company emblem
15 Pursuing
16 Math course
17 Ingenue
20 Past prime
21 Potbelly fuel
22 Consequently
23 Overwhelming defeat
24 Got a whiff of
26 Hale and hearty
29 Feudal masses
30 Citrus hybrid
31 Be in store
32 Yield to gravity
35 Jean Harlow, for one
39 To this day
40 Each and all
41 Part of HOMES
42 Do in a dragon
43 Self-defense art
45 Soft shades
48 Sister of Charles
49 Tessie or Milo
50 No-see-um
51 Take on the moguls
54 Likely wallflower
58 Spotted
59 Clear the board
60 Rosy anticipation
61 Nips in the bud
62 Small salamanders
63 Sink alternative

DOWN
1 Likewise
2 Bloodhound feature
3 Long in the tooth
4 Lobster eggs
5 Radical
6 In the offing
7 Upright framing piece
8 Half a score
9 Work unit
10 Parthenon's site
11 Put in the paper
12 Inasmuch as
13 __ on (goaded)
18 Ark collection
19 Shoplifting events
23 Downfall
24 On the sleazy side
25 Corn holder
26 Red birthstone
27 Goggle at
28 Record spoiler
29 Clammed up and down
31 Drives the getaway car
32 Antitoxins
33 Came to roost
34 Utter joy
36 Put down
37 Old Nick's knack
38 Roll-call response
42 Big mugs
43 Scoundrels
44 Hostile to
45 Oater extras
46 Deadly pale
47 Barest of evidence
48 Feeling of dread
50 Chew on
51 At a snail's pace
52 Military cap
53 Account entry
55 Barbie's boyfriend
56 High dudgeon
57 Sounds of surprise

Wednesday's Puzzle Solved

S	H	A	D	■	L	A	G	S	■	C	R	E	S	S
L	I	R	E	■	E	D	I	T	■	R	E	P	E	L
O	L	I	N	■	N	A	S	T	■	A	B	E	L	E
P	L	A	Y	I	N	G	T	H	E	F	I	E	L	D
■	■	■	■	C	O	E	■	■	L	T	D	■	■	■
C	A	R	L	I	N	■	P	I	T	Y	■	B	A	D
A	G	A	I	N	■	D	E	M	O	■	A	R	I	E
G	O	I	N	G	O	U	T	O	N	A	L	I	M	B
E	R	L	E	■	W	E	E	K	■	M	A	N	E	T
S	A	C	■	O	I	L	S	■	N	I	N	E	R	S
■	■	■	A	W	N	■	■	D	O	G	■	■	■	■
M	A	K	I	N	G	T	H	E	R	O	U	N	D	S
E	X	I	L	E	■	H	E	L	M	■	P	O	R	E
A	L	T	E	R	■	E	L	L	A	■	O	P	E	N
L	E	E	D	S	■	E	L	A	N	■	N	E	W	T

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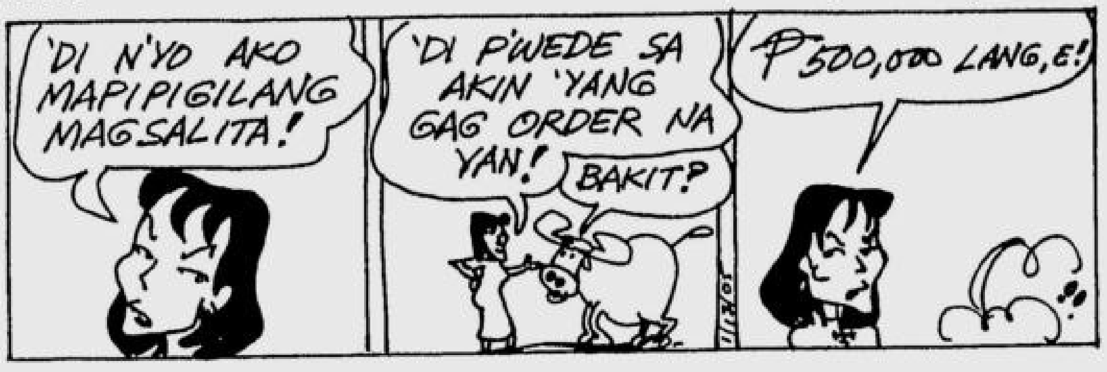
1/13/05

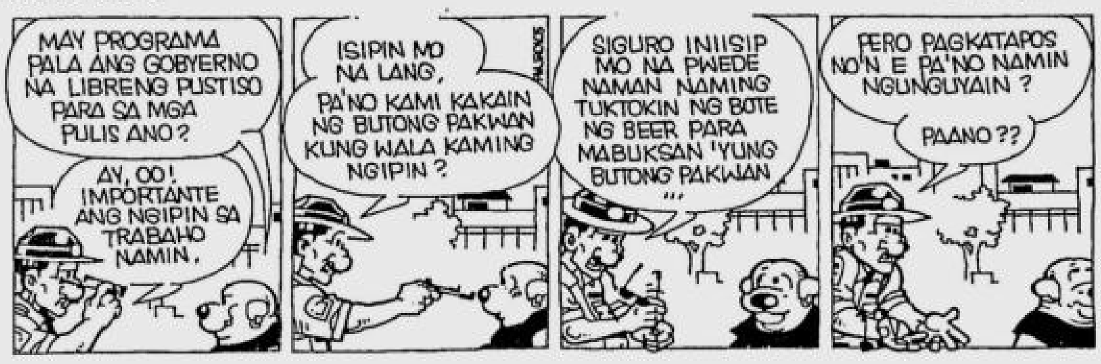
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


'DI N'YO AKO MAPIPIGILANG MAGSALITA!
'DI P'WEDE SA AKIN 'YANG GAG ORDER NA YAN!
BAKIT?
₱500,000 LANG, E!

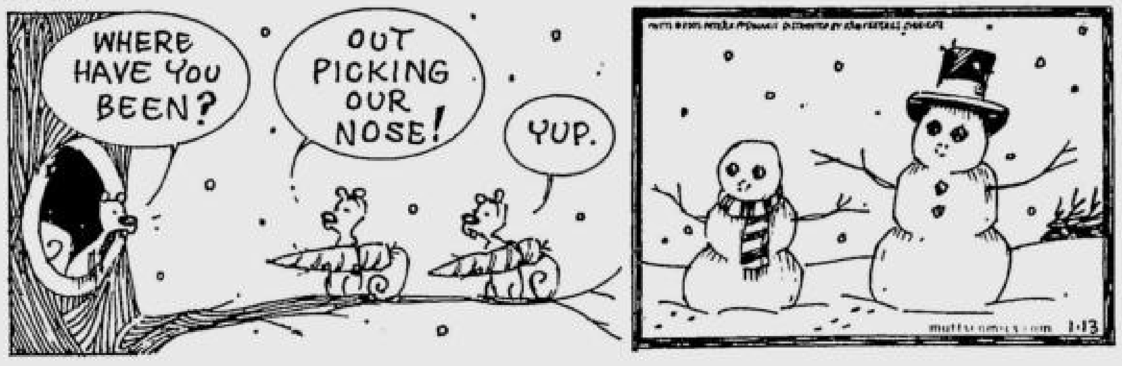
PUGAD BABOY

BY P.M. JUNIOR


MAY PROGRAMA PALA ANG GOBYERNO NA LIBRENG PUSTISO PARA SA MGA PULIS ANO?
AY, OO! IMPORTANTE ANG NGIPIN SA TRABAHO NAMIN.
ISIPIN MO NA LANG,
PA'NO KAMI KAKAIN NG BUTONG PAKWAN KUNG WALA KAMING NGIPIN?
SIGURO INIISIP MO NA PWEDE NAMAN NAMING TUKTOKIN NG BOTE NG BEER PARA MABUKSAN 'YUNG BUTONG PAKWAN...
PERO PAGKATAPOS NO'N E PA'NO NAMIN NGUNGUYAIN?
PAANO??

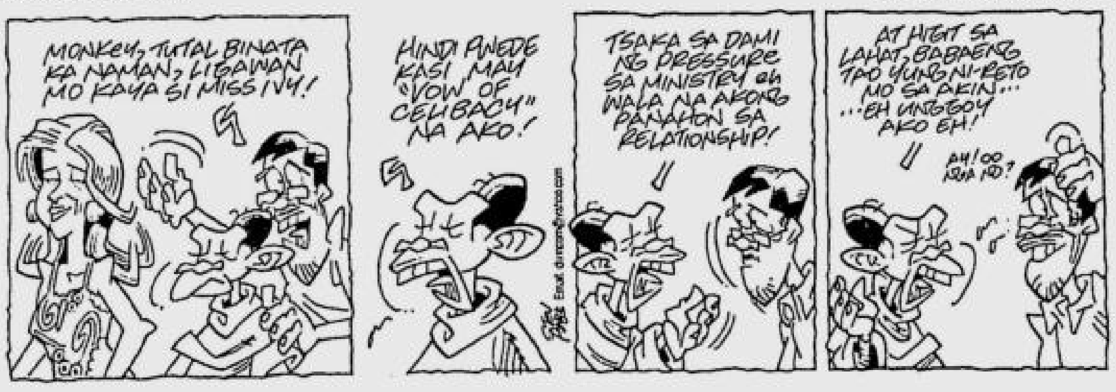
MUTTS

BY PATRICK McDONNELL


WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?
OUT PICKING OUR NOSE!
YUP.
muttscomics.com 1-13

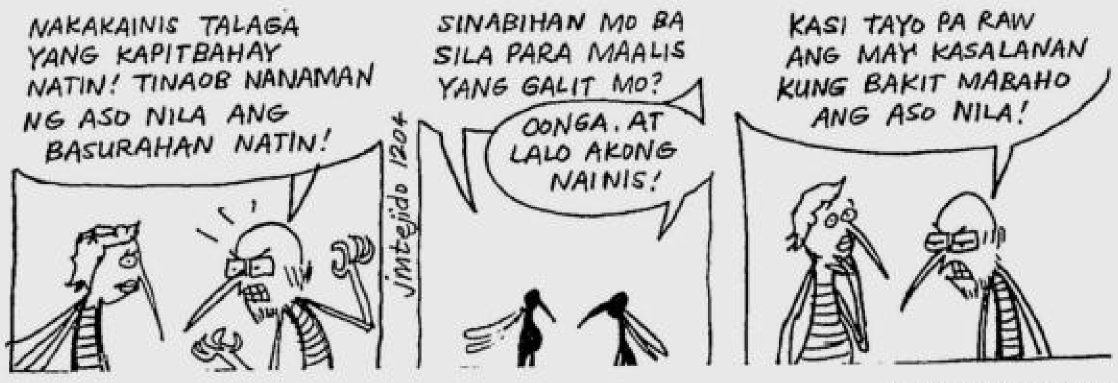
DIVINE COMEDY

BY STEVEN PABALINAS


MONKEY, TUTAL BINATA KA NAMAN, LIGAWAN MO KAYA SI MISS IVY!
HINDI PWEDE KASI MAY "VOW OF CELIBACY" NA AKO!
TSAKA SA DAMI NG PRESSURE SA MINISTRY EH WALA NA AKONG PANAHON SA RELATIONSHIP!
AT HIGIT SA LAHAT, BABAENG TAO YUNG NI-RETO MO SA AKIN... ...EH UNGGOY AKO EH!
AH! OO NGA NO?

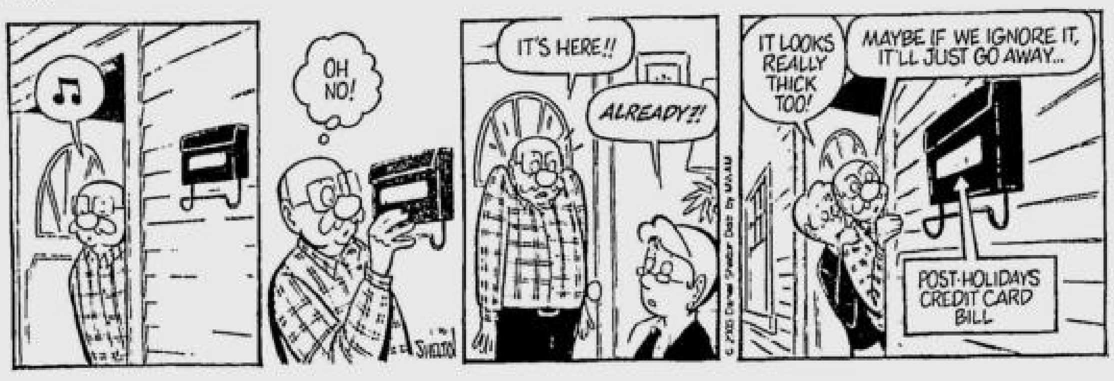
MIKROKOSMOS

BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


NAKAKAINIS TALAGA YANG KAPITBAHAY NATIN! TINAOB NANAMAN NG ASO NILA ANG BASURAHAN NATIN!
jmtejido 1204
SINABIHAN MO BA SILA PARA MAALIS YANG GALIT MO?
OONGA. AT LALO AKONG NAINIS!
KASI TAYO PA RAW ANG MAY KASALANAN KUNG BAKIT MABAHO ANG ASO NILA!

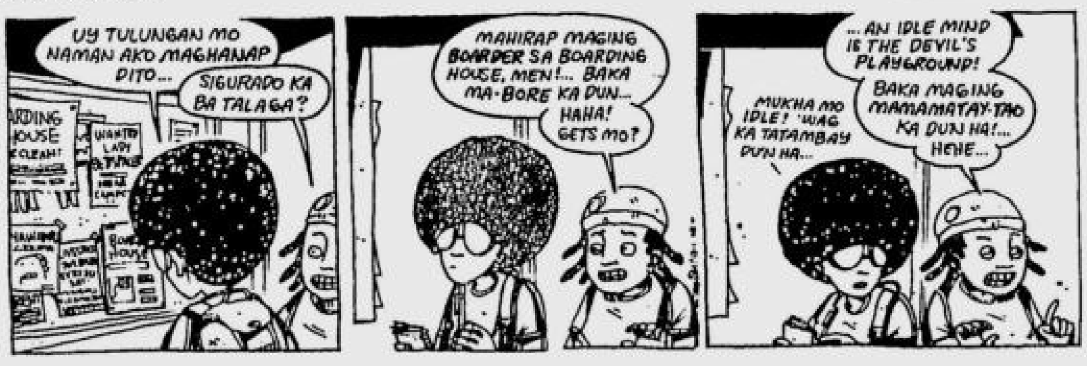
BEN

BY DANIEL SHELTON


♫
OH NO!
IT'S HERE!!
ALREADY?!
IT LOOKS REALLY THICK TOO!
MAYBE IF WE IGNORE IT, IT'LL JUST GO AWAY...
POST-HOLIDAYS CREDIT CARD BILL
SHELTON

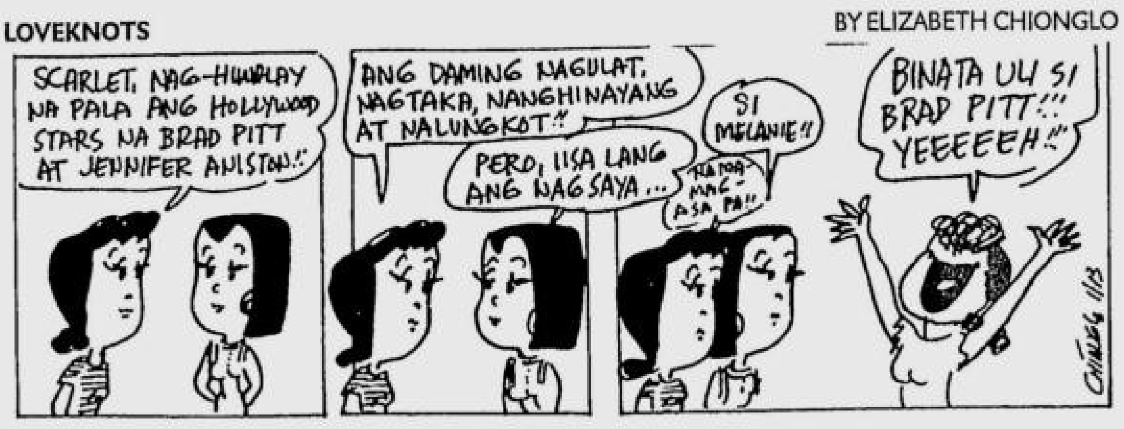
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA


UY TULUNGAN MO NAMAN AKO MAGHANAP DITO...
SIGURADO KA BA TALAGA?
MAHIRAP MAGING BOARDER SA BOARDING HOUSE, MEN!... BAKA MA-BORE KA DUN...
HAHA! GETS MO?
MUKHA MO IDLE! 'WAG KA TATAMBAY DUN HA...
...AN IDLE MIND IS THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND!
BAKA MAGING MAMAMATAY-TAO KA DUN HA!... HEHE...

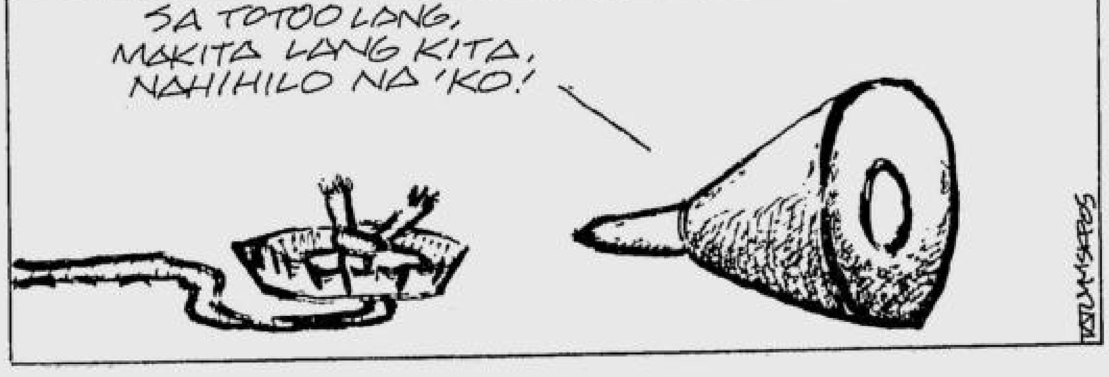
LOVEKNOTS

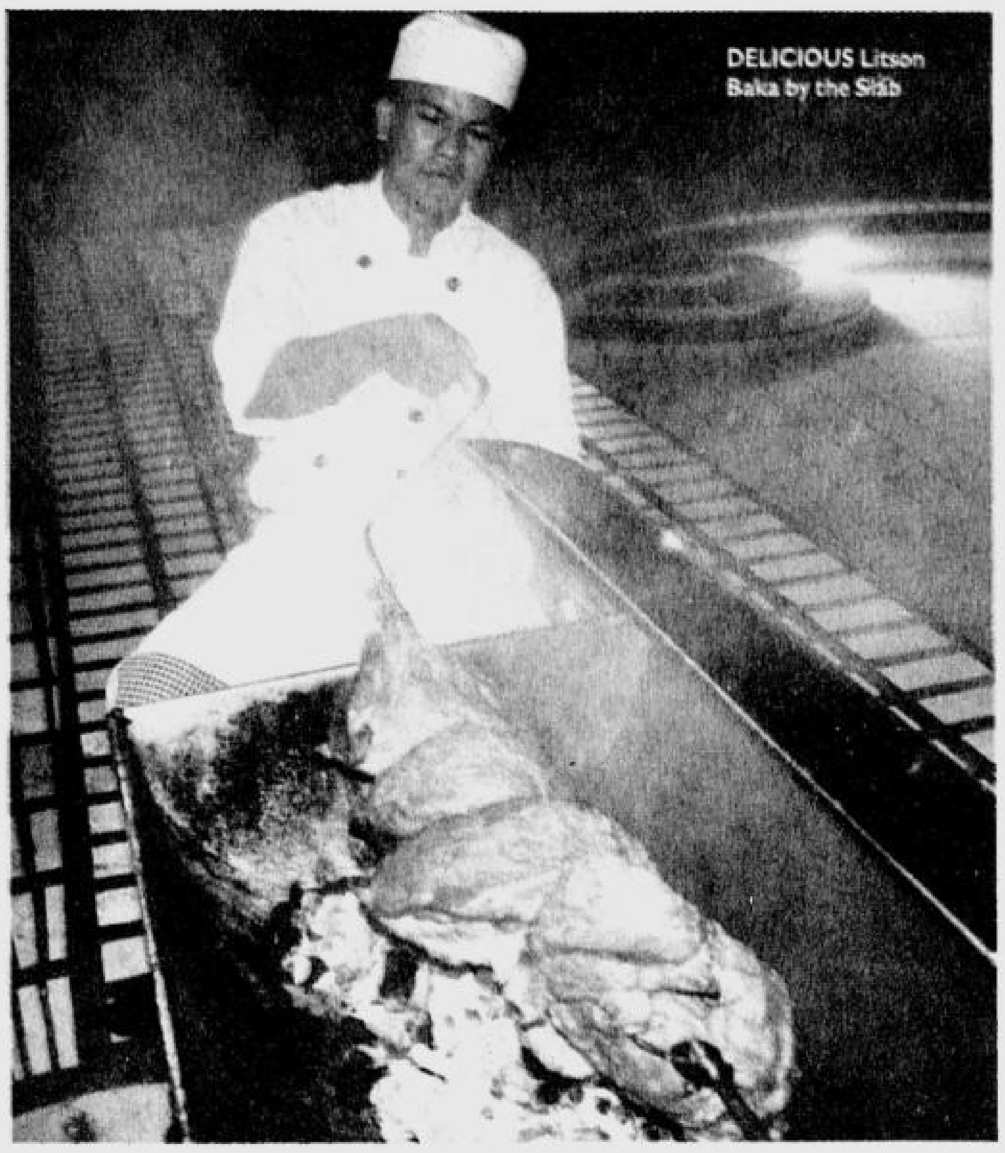
BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


SCARLET, NAG-HIWALAY NA PALA ANG HOLLYWOOD STARS NA BRAD PITT AT JENNIFER ANISTON!
ANG DAMING NAGULAT, NAGTAKA, NANGHINAYANG AT NALUNGKOT!
PERO, IISA LANG ANG NAGSAYA...
SI MELANIE!
NATOTO-MAG-ASA PA!
BINATA ULI SI BRAD PITT!!! YEEEEEH!!!
CHIONGLO 1/13

TULDOK

BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


SA TOTOO LANG, MAKITA LANG KITA, NAHIHILO NA 'KO!
TATUM&PAPU



DELICIOUS Litson Baka by the Slab

Mom's birthday leads to discovery of a lifetime

KITCHEN RESCUE

Reggie Aspiras

THIS IS all about my mom, who turned 79 last Jan. 8.

To her, we owe much of what is "good" in us and what we've become. She is many things to many people—former vice governor of La Union, socio-civic worker, the list goes on... But to us, she's the most endearing "Amparing," wife to the late Joe Aspiras; "Wowa" to her grandchildren and great grandchildren, and "Mom."

Each year, we try to make her birthday as special as it could be. My part in the project is consummate chef and "food scout." Topping the previous year is always difficult but my 2005 find is a discovery of a lifetime.

Vinia and JR Camacho came up with *Litson Baka* by the Slab, roasted and carved before your very eyes. The beef is from Australian cattle that the Camachos fatten and age in the Philippines. The gory days of a cow with a bamboo pole sticking from its mouth with eyes half open, pleading for help and asking "why, why is this being done to me?" are over!

But kidding aside, this is the best *litson baka* I've ever tasted. Imagine juicy slices of prime cut chuck of beef, marinated overnight in herbs and spices and served straight off a hot charcoal grill with gravy! Ecstasy in every bite!

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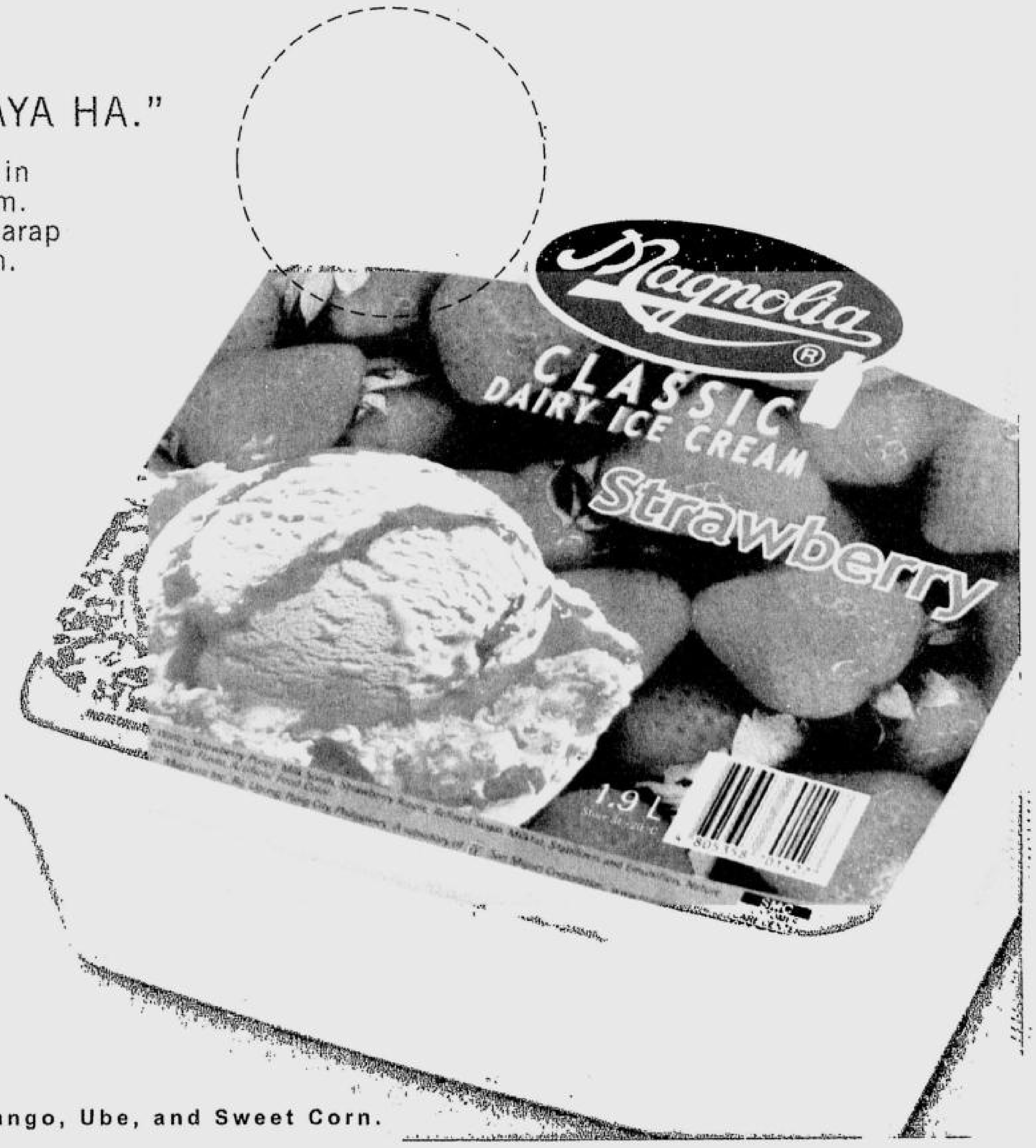

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Ronnie Ricketts is optimistic about action movies this year

By Remy Umerez
Conributor

PRODUCER/ACTOR Ronnie Ricketts is encouraged by the support he is getting from top industry leaders in his efforts to resuscitate the action genre in local movies.

His own outfit, Rocketts Productions is soon releasing one such project, "Uno," with high hopes that other movie companies will follow.

"We must not allow our movie industry to die," Ricketts says. "We have to strive harder and if needed, make sacrifices to help it recover. A lot of big stars, friends of mine are willing to cut down on their own talent fees to achieve our goal, and this is most welcome. Whenever I see low-quality imported film making a killing at the box-office, I feel sad because I know we can do better than most of them."

"Uno" also stars Monsour del Rosario who, for the first time, appears in a full-length movie with Ronnie. It was originally set for a December playdate. But upon the advice of his colleague and good friend Rudy Fernandez, Ricketts agreed to move the dates to mid-January.

Friendly counsel

"Daboy [Fernandez] asked if I was in a hurry," Ricketts says. "Otherwise, he said, I should go for January, since in December, people would rather shop than see a movie. Of course, he said the Metro Manila Film Festival was an exception, since moviegoers really prepare for that."

Del Rosario also invested in "Uno."

"I believe in Ronnie's integrity as a person and technical skill as director," Del Rosario says. "On top of which, he has always been a true friend since way, way back, and we are bound by our love for martial arts."

Another friend of Del Rosario's is a third investor.

Industry leaders Esperidion Laxa and Manny Nuqui shared the trio's optimism and reiterated their support for all local movies.

"Uno" is the story of two assas-

RONNIE/2

RICKETTS and Del Rosario: Adversaries only onscreen

MANZANO during OMB raid on Tuesday

JOAN BONDOC

OMB destroys ₱80-M worth of fake CDs, VCDs and DVDs

By Tina G. Santos

THE OPTICAL Media Board (OMB), led by its chair, actor and TV host Edu Manzano, yesterday destroyed P80-million worth of pirated CDs, VCDs and DVDs or some one million illegally copied titles.

Manzano said the counterfeit discs were confiscated from stores in Quiapo, Manila, Virra Mall in Greenhills, San Juan and Makati Cinema Square in Makati City during the last quarter of 2004.

The pirated products were shredded to ensure their total and complete destruction, said Manzano, adding that at least one-third of the confiscated discs were pornographic.

Shredding is one of two methods used by the OMB to destroy pirated discs. The shredder is a especially designed machine that destroys the discs and its packing materials. The more conventional way is crushing the discs using a steamroller (*pison*).

'War' continues

Manzano vowed that the widespread crackdown on vendors and manufacturers of pirated discs would continue, stressing that they would soon start filing cases against its vendors.

"We have been very understanding of the situation of the vendors but we cannot tolerate their illegal acts forever. We will have to start arresting vendors of pirated products in the next few weeks," Manzano said in a statement.

He also disclosed that one of the OMB's priorities this year is to assist the private sector in filing test cases against mall owners who continue to coddle pirates despite repeated warnings, charging them with "aiding and abetting" copyright infringement.

"Everyone has to do his share in fighting piracy. Mall owners cannot just close their eyes to illegal activities within their premises and expect to get away with it," Manzano said.

GMA 7 appeals ruling on libel, copyright infringement cases

GMA NETWORK has asked the Department of Justice (DOJ) to reverse and set aside the findings of the Quezon City Prosecutor's Office in: 1) the libel case it filed against ABS-CBN, and 2) the copyright infringement case filed by ABS-CBN against GMA Network executives in connection with the coverage of the arrival of Angelo de la Cruz, the Overseas Filipino Worker taken hostage by Iraqi rebels.

Earlier, the QCPO, through Investigating Prosecutor Dindo G. Venturanza, dismissed for lack of probable cause the libel charges filed by GMA Network against ABS-CBN executives and talents. It also charged GMA Network News Operations Head Grace dela Peña-Reyes and News Program Manager John Oliver Manalastas with violating the Intellectual Property Code.

In its petition for review before the DOJ dated Jan. 4, 2005, GMA Network, through counsels Gener E. Asuncion, Eric Vincent A. Estoesta and Pierre M. Cantara of Belo Gozon Elma Parel Asuncion and Lucila Law Office, said the QCPO's ruling on the said cases was "not in accord with the facts, law and jurisprudence."

Intent to defame

GMA said that the QCPO committed error in finding that there was no libel or defamatory imputation in the statements aired in ABS-CBN's news reports where ABS-CBN accused GMA Network of stealing its video footage of the arrival of Angelo de la Cruz last July 22, 2004.

GMA said the statements made by ABS-CBN news anchor Erwin Tulfo and reporter Lynda Jumilla in two separate programs—"Insider" on July 22, 2004 and "Magandang Umaga Bayan"—portrayed the GMA Network people as "thieves," "snatchers" and "usurpers."

The City Prosecutor was wrong, GMA said, when it ruled that the statements made by Tulfo and Jumilla were "factual and true, without unfair or uncalled [for] comments, and were broadcast in good faith and for justifiable ends."

'Speculation'

As for the copyright infringement case, GMA protested that the QCPO's bases for finding De la Peña-Reyes and Manalastas liable for copyright infringement "are mere surmises, conjectures and speculations."

According to GMA, there is no basis for the City Prosecutor to say that because De la Peña-Reyes is head of News Operations and Manalastas is program manager, they have direct control and supervision of the news room. The QCPO said the two "must have been aware that the footage coming from Reuters and CNN, to which GMA is a subscriber, had a 'No Access Philippines' advisory."

The news control room is the area of Engineering, GMA said, and the feed in question was "breaking news," and not anticipated by the Technical Operations Center.

Not the smell of Lipa roses

By Carla P. Gomez
PDI Visayas Bureau

BACOLOD CITY—Hope Ate Vi wakes up and smells the garbage.

An environment group plans to file charges against Lipa Mayor Vilma Santos if she fails to fulfill her promise to close an open dumpsite in her city.

Elisea Gozun, former environment secretary and now chair of Earthday Network Philippines, on Tuesday said they would first send Santos a "notice of intent to sue" before filing charges for violating the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 or Republic Act 9003.

Due process

"We observe due process. First, we send a notice of intent to sue to allow local officials to act on complaints. If they fail to do so, we file charges," said Gozun who was here to speak before the mayors of Negros Occidental during a workshop on the Ecological Solid Waste Act.

She said the Earthday Network Philippines, the Tanggol Kalikasan and the Integrated Bar of the Philippines would act as complainants on the case.

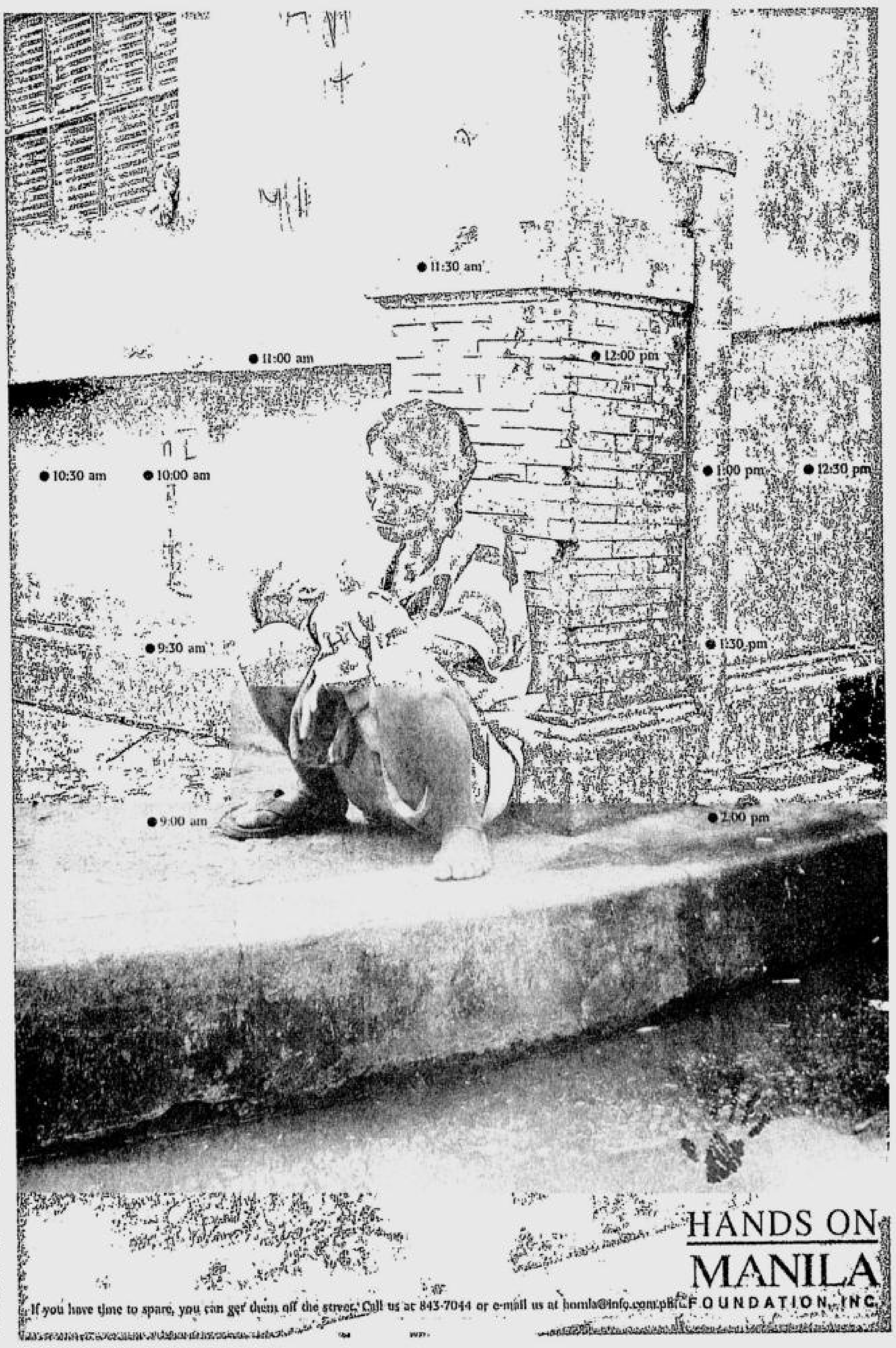
The law allows ordinary citizens to file appropriate civil, criminal and administrative charges against public officers who violate the law.

According to Gozun, several people in Lipa have complained about the open dumpsite.

Promise

She said the Lipa City government promised to close the open dumpsite by Jan. 5 and would open a controlled dumpsite that would minimize the adverse impact of

NOT THE SMELL/3



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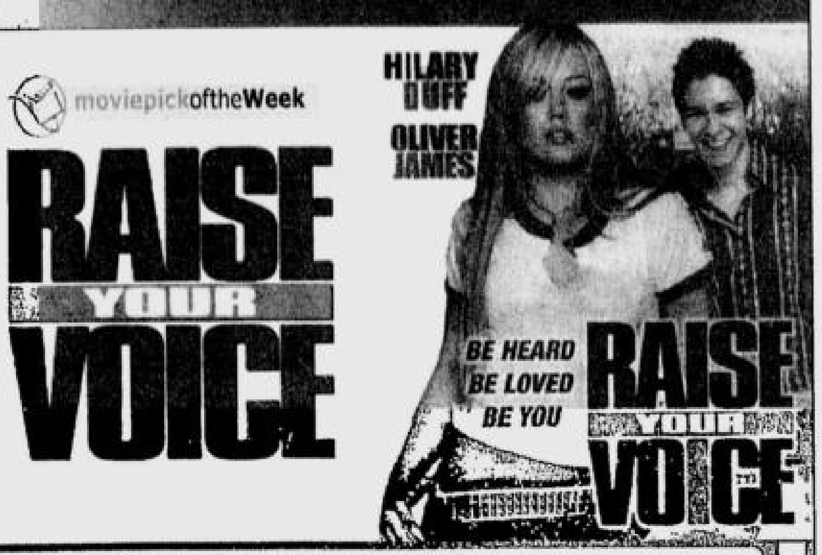

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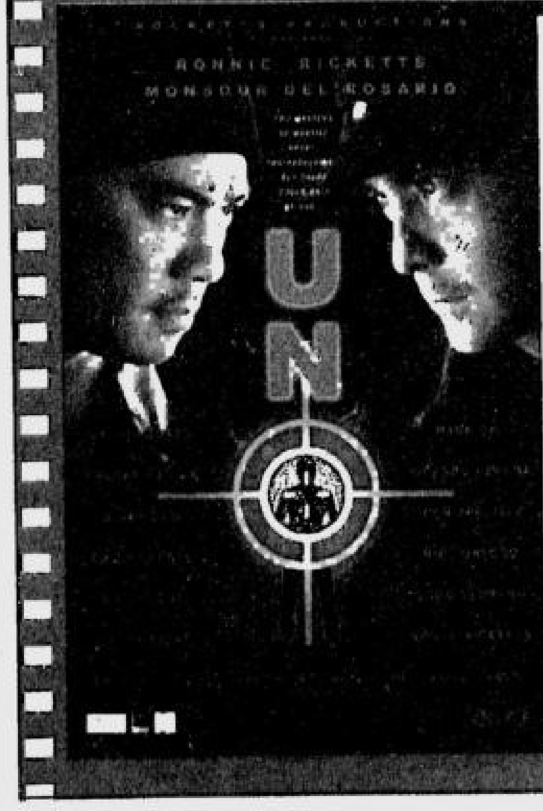

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January 22-23, 2005

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Watch out for the stars of UNO as they head to SM Cinemas!

Rehashed tricks still make Chow fans laugh

By Raymond Robert Burgos
Contributor

REVIEW

KUNG FU Hustle," the latest film directed and starred in by actor-comedian Stephen Chow, rehashes tried and tested tricks.

Those who have seen Chow's early films—now being shown on Destiny Cable's CTTV (Channel 66)—are bound to spot familiar scenes. The one where Chow, as the small-time thief Sing, is accidentally stabbed by his sidekick with three knives is similar to a scene in "Sixty Million Dollar Man" (1995) where he played the role of "Terminator" type who works as a knife-thrower in a circus.

OPPS. Have you seen this before?

Another scene, where his lips are bloated, is a formula he used in "Forbidden City Cop" (1996), as a secret agent working for the Chinese emperor; and also in "The Flirting Scholar" (1993), where he was a famous poet and painter named Tong Pak Foo.

The use of a kung fu manual called Buddha Palm, with which the young Sing honed his martial arts skills, is yet another spinoff from an old Chow movie, "King of Destruction" (1994), about a food delivery boy who wanted to win the heart of a female judo expert.

Chow gets away with most of it, and in fact makes his "Kung Fu Hustle" audience crack up at every turn. The film's plot, which follows the main protagonist from being villain to hero, likewise recalls two of his previous movies—"Hail the Judge" (1994), where he played a corrupt magistrate who had a change of heart and became the people's champion, and "God of Cookery" (1996), where he was an arrogant and filthy rich "champion chef" who found solace in a Shaolin Temple and learned the real art of cookery.

The final fight scene in "Kung Fu Hustle," where Sing ascends to the heavens in a glorious trance, is similar to the last sequence in "God of Cookery," where the clouds parted and a Buddhist saint appeared to bless the hero.

Also, one cannot help but recall the final scene in Chows' "Shaolin Soccer" (2001), where Buddha himself grants Chow's character supernatural powers with which to defeat his opponents.

What do make "Kung Fu Hustle" different from previous Chow projects are new effects and fight routines. This is not surprising, since these scenes are choreographed by Yuen Wo Ping, fight choreographer for the Oscar-winning "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and "The Matrix."

Overall, "Kung Fu Hustle" is an improvement on earlier slapstick Chinese comedy flicks. Moviegoers who will be seeing Stephen Chow for the first time are bound to be willing participants in the fun and laughter.

(The author is a connoisseur of Chinese kung fu movies and Japanese samurai films. He practices aikido, a Japanese martial art.)

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Ronnie...

From page 1

sins (Ricketts and Del Rosario) who are thrown in a situation where one of them has to be eliminated.

Ricketts says: "With a modest budget of P10 million, we can make a believable action move. The action movies that I do don't require big blasts and other special effects. They are more like the movies of Jackie Chan. *Mano-mano* (hand combat). The use of special effects makes a movie very expensive. We don't have that kind of money. [This is why] foreign films have an advantage here. If we cut down on the importation of foreign films, the moviegoers' interest will be diverted to the local stuff.'"

Digital's fine

But he welcomes the use of digital equipment. "I took a seminar on modern approaches in filmmaking. While it has its advantages, I still prefer the traditional or conventional way. I like editing my own films. But I go digital for sound. I'm doing it slowly, one aspect at a time."

With the economic crisis facing the country, Ricketts says he would be lucky to do—produce and direct—three action movies for 2005. But he could direct for other producers he says, only half in jest.

Fernandez seems eager to be directed by Ricketts, for one, after seeing "Uno."

The movie also stars Danica Sotto, Ricardo Cepeda, TJ Trinidad, Bruce Ricketts, Cheska Garcia, Michael Rivero, and opens in SM Cinemas Jan. 19.

New York
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ACTOR Bill Murray fixes actress Susan Sarandon's collar as they pose for photographers during the New York Times Arts and Leisure Weekend photo-op at CUNY Graduate Center on Jan. 7 in New York City.

Jolie factor in Brad-Jen split-up 'not confirmed'

LOS ANGELES—The separation of Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston, one of the most famous couples in the world, has prompted reporters to spill ink by the gallon as the Hollywood press began to speculate about the cause of the breakup.

Aniston and Pitt called it quits on Friday after four years of marriage, as headlines and television shows wondered: Could it have been differences over the ideal moment to have a child? Was it interference from a growing friendship between Pitt and sultry actress Angelina Jolie?

The break came as Pitt, 41, reportedly wanted so start a family, something Aniston, 35, wanted to put off in favor of her career.

People west coast editor Todd Gold said that was part of the reason. Aniston also wanted to make sure her marriage would last, Gold said.

Then, there is speculation that Jolie, named sexiest woman by Esquire last year, caught Pitt's eye, too, as they worked together on "Mr. and Mrs. Smith."

THE FAMOUS couple in sweeter times

Fishbowl existence

"There was no confirmation that he had an affair with Angelina Jolie," Jess Cagle, the People editor, said.

But there's been no outright denial, either.

"We do know that a respect developed and they became friends and I'm not sure that sat well with Jennifer Aniston.

"It pointed to this problem they had through their marriage. They lived their life in a fishbowl. They could not do anything without speculation going rampant: Were they going to have a baby? Were they back together? Were they breaking up?"

But not all hope is lost, Cagle said. "They're just separated. Maybe they'll get back together." Yet he wonders why this private couple would go through all this trouble.

"It is a very big deal for them."

The separation of the couple, which had the impact of the Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise breakup in 2001, came after four and a half years of marriage and months of rumor prompted when Aniston showed up at the opening of "Ocean's Twelve" without her ring. *AFP*

Not the smell ...

From page A1

pollution.

Apparently, Gozun said, the operation of the open dumpsite continued because the Department of Environment and Natural Resources earlier sent a notice of violation to the Lipa City government.

The INQUIRER tried to contact Santos, but she was unavailable.

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AUDREY Tautou loves acting, and will not compromise it with projects that don't excite her.

'I'm not beautiful, I'm just cute'

Audrey 'Amelie' Tautou on herself and 'A Very Long Engagement'

AUDREY TAUTOU conquered moviegoers hearts all the world three years ago as the inimitable, quirky "Amelie."

Needless to say, the whimsical romance, directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet and nominated for a Best Foreign Film Oscar, brought the French actress instant fame.

Now, Tautou, 26, is back in another Jeunet film, "A Very Long Engagement."

The movie is based on a World War I novel by Sébastien Japrisot, who died only last year, and tells of a young woman's relentless, moving and sometimes comic search for her fiance, who disappeared during the war.

Is this "Amélie Goes to War?"

"There's a familiar air about 'A Very Long Engagement,'" Tautou admits. "But that's because all of Jean-Pierre's heroines are orphans, or they come from modest backgrounds. They're lonesome and have some kind of poetry about them."

Of her character, Mathilde, she says, "She's very romantic. She manages to transcend real life. I think that's why people like Jean-Pierre's universe. He makes us dream."

Do you believe in childhood romance that lasts a lifetime?

It is possible. My grandparents have been married for 66 years now.

How is it different working with a Jean-Pierre Jeunet material that's much more serious than the last one?

I was different because I had to stay in the same mood, focused on Mathilde. I couldn't go too far between the scenes because I was scared to lose her. So I was more lonely and more in my own bubble than before. I tend to be close to my character even if I'm not shooting.

Your character is very superstitious. Are you that way in person?

Not anymore. I used to be like that in the past. Today, I'm a bit superstitious, but it's not like I go crazy over black cats, I won't walk under a ladder, I touch wood very often, I don't talk about my projects until I'm completely sure that I will do it—that kind of thing.

You still don't want to work in America. What's stopping you?

It's not that I don't want to, it's just that I didn't get any offers that interested me. That's all. I'm not going to accept a project that I don't think is going to make a good movie, only because it's made by a Hollywood producer. I really love what I do, so I try to do only movies that excite me artistically. But I don't have any prejudgment against doing American films.

Are you as cheerful and optimistic about relationships as Mathilde?

Cheerful, sort of ... but, I don't know, I'm a normal person who goes up and down [emotionally]. I don't analyze myself, I don't really want to know. I think that I'm a bit out of focus and I'm fine with that. I just live without asking myself thousands of questions.

Does Jean-Pierre Jeunet's visual style help you, or does it make it more difficult for you to stay in character?

When I deal with a character, I am not influenced by the design or anything else. I just feel more confident by working with somebody that I know and who trusts me and knows exactly where he wants to go and what he's expecting from you. He gives a lot of freedom even though his frame and his aestheticism are very precise and prepared. That's his style.

Is there something about the way that you two work together that makes your collaboration more fruitful than those with other directors?

Everybody has a different universe and different style of working, but it's all very enriching.

Do you deliberately use your beauty as a tool?

Beauty never lasts. I'm not thinking about that. I want to make myself less ugly if possible, uplift my potential [laughs], just because it's nicer to watch myself.

How do you "uplift" yourself?

I don't know. I don't consider myself as a beauty. I can consider Julia Roberts or Monica Belucci as beauties. But me, I'm just cute [laughs].

What qualities do you think French and European films bring to the US marketplace?

I think French movies have a distinct culture. I think we have, in France, a different way of producing movies. I would say the spirit of the industry is less obvious, less present, less important. So it gives a feeling that movies have more room, space. It's just a different way of shooting. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, even when making movies that are bigger and bound to be more popular, has a very, very personal style.

("A Very Long Engagement," distributed by Warner Bros., opens Feb. 2 in Metro Manila theaters.)

New York's DJ Anthony rouses Club Government

His heart and soul is electronica, and he describes his version as 'tribal house,' a more aggressive beat compared to trance or techno.

By Clarissa S. Batino

HIS IS an unrelenting passion for electronica bordering on an obssession to keep the crowd on the dance floor until the club says, "Party's over."

DJ Anthony, a 35-year-old Fil-American, is one of the hottest electronica jocks in the city that never sleeps.

But he says the New York club scene has gotten so packed, that he and fiancee/manager Carmela Villaroman have been doing gigs elsewhere in the United States, and in Latin America and Asia.

He has played almost everywhere in NY that he should spin for, he says; time to rave in other hotspots.

So he has brought his act to parties in New Orleans, Hawaii, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, Bali, and Jakarta. Rave scenes, by a New Yorker's standards, means thousands of party animals at a time.

Turn RP on

On vacation in the Philippines recently, Anthony had a taste of the club scenes in Boracay and Metro Manila, did one gig in Makati's Club Government ... and loved it.

He wants to come back and do more raves in his place of birth. He left the Philippines at two years old, when his family migrated to the United States, and did not see the country again until he came home with Carmela in December.

"I want to spin more for Filipino clubbers. I believe more of them could get to like electronica if they gave it a chance," says Anthony. He laments that the Manila club scene is not as developed as in other parts of Asia.

Anthony says he wants to turn on the Philippines to his brand of dance music and revive the spirit of discotheques with purely instrumental club tunes.

HIS JOB is to make people dance, he says, and keep them dancing.

DJ from NY: Let me turn you on.

"I prefer music without vocals because then, I don't have lyrics to distract me and I can be more creative. I can tell my 'story' better," he explains.

Young genre

Electronica is a relatively young genre of dance music that is further split into several types—including trance, house, and techno. It has been associated with rave parties and inevitably with Paul van Dyk, perhaps the most popular of electronica artists.

PVD specializes in trance, a hypnotic rhythm that puts the crowd, well, in a trance.

Anthony's electronica is a mix of techno and house, although he refers to it often as tribal house, a more aggressive rhythm compared to trance or even techno.

He says this sound has kept thousands on their feet at the parties he has spun for until 7 or 8 a.m.

His work as a DJ is all about parties but that doesn't mean it is not tiring. In Club Government, he spun from 10 p.m. until 5 a.m., nonstop. Not even for a pee break.

The pro that he is, Anthony relies on a combination of planning and spontaneity to do a good job.

Well-planned sets

Every set is well planned. He brings with him an i-Mac laptop containing his playlist, a bag full of CDs and vinyls of samples and his own mixes.

He keeps an outline but departs from it once in a while, depending on how the crowd takes to the beat.

Anthony says he plays only for clubs that have "acceptable," if not superior, equipment consisting basically of two turntables and a mixing set. He uses one turntable to scratch, the other to play and the mixers to get things going.

All that in place, Anthony says it is up to him to keep the club rocking until everybody has left. In Club Government, he spun until the last group left the dance floor.

"My job is to keep the floor jumping all night. I have to make people stay as long as they can and they have to leave the place satisfied," he says.

Inside the DJ booth, he is the boss. He starts out with a "tamer" beat of trance, as it were, just to perk things up. Then he teases the crowd with music that pulls the people ravers to the dance floor. Once they do, Anthony keeps them hooked with the pumping beat, until he feels they need a rest ... then he slows down the pace.

His website describes his style as: "Tribal House melts into Trance. Trance fades into Techno and the blends continue, eventually merging to form a complete musical circle that mesmerizes and energizes."

Unique gigs

Carmela says Anthony's gigs are unique. "He has built a reputation. He can really get a crowd going," says the proud manager. His electronica that is "in-your face," she adds, sort of a like a slam dunk that is hard to forget.

Anthony himself remembers getting hooked on dance music at 11 years old when he started tinkering with his father's cassette player. That early, he started experimenting with splicing and editing.

"I was inspired by European music of the late '80s. I got particularly hooked on synthesizers. I realized that I have collected so many albums and I wanted to do something with them," says Anthony.

Growing up in New York exposed him to the local club scene. He remembers a discotheque called Twilo, where he went to religiously for four straight years every Friday during the 1990s.

Twilo, says Anthony, was the seat of electronica in New York, where only the best used to play for an average crowd of 5,000. Unfortunately, the club has closed down.

At about the same time that he frequented Twilo, Anthony started producing his own gigs in equally prominent venues like Exit, Tunnel, Webster Hall, and Limelight.

"We threw our own parties where Anthony was the DJ and the crowd poured in," recounts Carmela. "The bookings got more and more exciting, and the crowd wanted more of him."

Heart and soul

In time, Anthony says, he wants to produce his own tracks. Coming up with an album is expensive, he points out, as he has to pay about $3,000 for every record that he samples.

After his Manila visit, he wants to incorporate local, ethnic sounds into his groove to give electronica a new flavor. This, he believes would rock both New York and Manila.

For now, Anthony is back in the Big Apple where he regularly raves in several local clubs regularly. By day he is a freelance graphics design artist.

But electronica is his heart and soul and an electronica DJ is what he plans to be for the rest of his life. "Dance music will never die," he says. "It will only transform into something better and I am going to progress with it."

MTV VJ auditions today and Sunday

MTV PHILIPPINES goes to the SM City Cebu today and the SM Megamall on Sunday for the original biennial VJ search, the MTV VJ Hunt.

The search is for male and female veejays, 18 to 25 years of age, who are fluent in English, and able to speak in conversational Filipino. Interested parties should turn up early, sign up, and grab an audition spot.

Registration begins at 10 a.m.

After the auditions, 14 finalists will be chosen. This year, there will be four winners, twice as many as in previous years. The four will join the ranks of VJs KC Montero, Sarah Meier, Marc Abaya, Cindy Kurleto, Maike Evers, Cesca Litton, Reema Chanco, John Joe Joseph and Mariel Rodriguez.

For more information, check out print ads, call the MTV office at (02) 889-9251, or tune in to MTV Philippines.

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